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Our daily homily







# Our Daily Homily

Volume IV: Isaiah—Malachi

## By Rev. F. B. Meyer

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Volume IV: Isaiah-Malachi

By the Rev.

F. B. MEYER, B.A.

AUTHOR OF

"The Shepherd Psalm," "Old Testament Heroes,"  
"Christian Living," etc., etc.

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“THE Scriptures are well called Holy Scriptures; and though assailed by camp, by battery, and by mine, they are, nevertheless, an house built upon a rock, and that rock impregnable. The weapon of offence which shall impair their efficiency for aiding in the redemption of mankind has not yet been forged. And the Sacred Canon, which it took (perhaps) two thousand years from the accumulations of Moses, down to the acceptance of the Apocalypse to construct, is like to wear out the storms and the sunshine of the world, and all the wayward aberrations of humanity, not merely for a time as long, but until time shall be no more.”

The late W. E. GLADSTONE.



## OUR DAILY HOMILY

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*I will purge away thy dross, and take away all thine alloy.*

*Isa. i. 25 (R. V., marg.).*

THE silver had become dross. Jerusalem, the chosen city, was filled with infidelity, formalism, impurity, and deeds of violence. She had been full of judgment, righteousness had lodged in her; but now, murderers. And this was the reason for the blows that had fallen upon her with such unsparing force. The whole land was now desolate; the cities burned with fire; only a small remnant of the people was left. The prophet, his patriot heart wrung with grief, compares her to a sick man in the last stage of disease, the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint; from the sole of the foot, even unto the head, there is no soundness in it. Would it not be well for us to search our hearts, and ask whether there may not be some counterpart to this in our declension from our God, and the consequent suffering to which we have been brought? He loves us too well to allow the process of deterioration to go unchecked.

But here the Almighty Lover of His people resolves to bring His hand to the work of entire purging and cleansing. He will no longer simply punish. He will take away the men who had been His adversaries and enemies from the midst of His people, thoroughly purging away the dross and taking away all the tin. There is an immeasurable difference between punishing and refining. It is a great matter for the soul, when God ceases from the one and commences the other; and when we no longer suffer from the results of past sins, but are restored as at the first, and converted as at the beginning.

*O House of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord.* *Isa. ii. 5.*

TO what a walk are we called ! *In newness of life* : "Like as Christ was raised from the dead to the glory of the Father." *In Christ* : "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him." *Like Christ* : "He that saith he abideth in Him, ought so to walk even as He walked." *By and after the Spirit* : "Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh." *Worthy of God and well pleasing to Him* : "Walk worthy of the Lord unto all well-pleasing, being fruitful." *In heavenly love, and light, and faith* : "Walk in love" ; "Walk in the light, as He is in the light" ; "Walk by faith, not by sight."

This invitation is primarily addressed to the house of Jacob. Sometimes the elect people are spoken of as Israel ; but when *Jacob* is used, they are reminded of the vein of duplicity and chicanery which lies imbedded in their nature. Such people need specially to "walk in the light of the Lord" until the brooding darkness of their nature is dispelled. You will never succeed in ridding yourself of the self-life, with its jealousies and impurities, until you have learned to walk in the light of the Lord. Nothing is so hostile to disease and corruption as light and air ; believe me, the one way by which we can become sound and strong is to abide in Christ, that He may abide in us.

*Walk involves steps.* We cannot enjoy the presence of God as a whole unless it governs and illumines every step. We must be perpetually looking into our Father's face and asking where to place the next step. We must have fellowship with Him in all things ; then we, who have been darkness, will be light in the Lord, and as we walk in the light we shall become children of light.



*I will not be an healer : . . . make me not a ruler of the people.*

*Isa. iii. 7.*

GENERALLY men aspire to be rulers ; the emolument and honor of the position are infinitely attractive. But the prophet supposes a case in which the people gather round one who has saved a little more than the others from the general wreck, and entreat him to assume the responsibility of directing public affairs. But he refuses, not wishing to be involved in the disasters that have swept the fatherland. Isaiah cites this as the most complete evidence of the desperate situation brought about by wrongdoing.

It is the mark of great deterioration in a religious community when none are forthcoming to take responsibility, none who have power to lead. It is a grave sentence, "I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them." Never shrink from assuming any responsibility to which God and the Church evidently call you. It is an easier life to remain among the stunted undergrowth ; but if God calls you to be a forest tree, with fast-spreading branches, humbly accept the opportunity, and fill up its full measure. His grace is sufficient. Better to fail in a great endeavor than to live safely having evaded the Divine call. Have you bread and clothing ? account yourself God's steward.

What a striking contrast is suggested to the love of Jesus Christ ! "He saw that there was no man, . . . therefore His own arm brought salvation." He knew that if He espoused the cause of our lost race, it would involve Him in the bitterest agony and woe. But He steadfastly set His face to the accomplishment of our redemption : He stood up to plead our cause : and He will not lay down His chosen work until He hath brought judgment unto victory.

*Over all the glory a canopy.*

*Isa. iv. 5 (R. V.).*

THESE twain, the pillar of cloud by day, and the flaming fire by night, were reserved in the wanderings for the tabernacle only; but this promise predicts that they shall be the heritage of each individual home. "The Lord will create over every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night" (R. V., *marg.*). Each family may have its own cloudy pillar to guide, its own illumination through the dark hours, its own canopy from storm and rain and heat. Let this be your comfort: though your family is scattered afar, all the members may dwell in the same pavilion, be directed by the movements of the same pillar-cloud, and enlightened by the glow of the same fire. In God there is no distance; and they who abide in Him live in a dwelling-place which is wild enough to include the world, but narrow enough to draw our hearts into so small a circle that God and we and our loved ones may touch.

There is even more than this suggested in these words. Each holy soul may have all the gracious contents of this promise, because it has become the temple of the indwelling Lord, through the Holy Spirit. For thee there may be the pillar-cloud, arising to guide thy steps through the wilderness world, or settling down with its fleecy folds to rest. For thee, through long dark nights, the pillar of fire—and, indeed, only the darkness can reveal the bright light in the cloud. For thee also the canopy—for it is written, "He shall spread His tabernacle over them" (Rev. xxi. 3, *Gk.*). How God suits Himself to our varying need—now a cloud, again as fire; in the storm a covert, from the heat a shadow. He is always adapting His help to our need.

*What could have been done more to my vineyard,  
that I have not done in it?*                      *Isa. v. 4.*

THIS is what the Owner of all souls will say of His dealings with each when the discipline and husbandry of time are over. Each of us is God's vineyard, and for each God has done the best possible. At the end of all things God will have no reason to feel that had He adopted some other method, the barren waste of some heart would have brought forth fruit. It will be seen then, Omniscience itself being witness, that every soul of man had the chance of becoming a fruitful vineyard; and if he became the reverse, it was due to no failure in either the wisdom or grace of God.

It is hard to believe this, hard to think that you would not have done better in some other circumstances; but it is nevertheless true that God could not have done better or more. He has trenched for water, gathered out stones which had hindered your fruitfulness, and planted you with slips from the True Vine. There has been the tower of His protection, and the wine-press of suffering! Ah, how eagerly He has looked that you should bring forth grapes! The pity of it is that there has been nothing but the wild growth of nature! But God cannot take the blame for this. He could not have done more than He has done. Alas that we should have so often thwarted Him!

“When I looked.” “The Father seeketh,” our Saviour said. He comes down the garden path full often, seeking from us the fruits of the Spirit, the grace of prayer and supplication, the plants of His delight. “Let us see,” He says, “whether the vine hath budded, and its blossom be opened, and the pomegranates be in flower.” Too often it is as when Jesus looked for figs—there was nothing but leaves!

SERAPHIM signifies "burning ones," to designate their essence, their dazzling appearance, or their intense devotion. But whatever the symbol stands for, they needed the six wings. With twain each seraph covered his face—for reverence, he dare not look upon God. With twain he covered his feet—for humility, he recognized that he was unworthy. With twain he did fly—for service and obedience to the Divine commands.

It may be that we are taught that a third part only of our time and energy should be expended in activity; two-thirds to reverent fellowship and communion. Probably with most of us the proportion is in the other direction; and we give two-thirds to flight for God, and one-third only for fellowship with God.

The service that springs from such communion is directed by deep sympathy with the mind of God. The seraph did not wait for the Lord to send him to Isaiah with a live coal from the altar; but spontaneously the son of flame sped to do the required office, as though instinctively he realized that there was nothing else to be done for a man who had confessed himself to be vile. The seraphim have heard that confession made so often, and have so often administered the same restorative to fainting hearts, that they do not need to be directed what to do. They know God's thought before He speaks a word. A notable emblem this of service!

"One cried to another." Holy beings love to stir each other to higher themes, to worthier praise. Thus one bird may awake a woodland into minstrelsy; and one Luther an age. Is your heart full of burning love?—then seek to set others aglow.

*Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither let  
thine heart be faint.* *Isa. vii. 4 (R.V.).*

SERIOUS trouble seemed imminent. Two strong peoples were bearing down on Jerusalem, and the heart of the house of David was moved as the trees of the forest are moved with the wind. Fear like this demoralizes men and nations. It unfits them for wise and strong action. Hence the necessity that Isaiah should reassure Ahaz with these words.

They were not sent to him because of his righteousness or virtue, for he was one of the weakest and most idolatrous of the kings of David's line; but because his foes were acting in direct collision with the determined counsel and purpose of God. Such a coalition may be threatening you to-day; but it is in vain for the breakers of human pride and hate to attempt to intrude within limits which God has set around His chosen. Come, my soul, enter thou into thy chamber, and shut thy door about thee! Be quiet! God will fight for you. Be not dismayed; God's purpose cannot be overthrown. Let not thine heart be faint. Lo, a virgin has borne a Son, whose name is Immanuel—God with us. "Fear not: I bring you glad tidings of great joy. To you is born a Saviour."

God Incarnate is the end of fear; and the heart that realizes that He is in the midst, that takes heed to the assurance of His loving presence, will be quiet in the midst of alarm. No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise in judgment against thee thou shalt condemn. Only be patient and be quiet.

"For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,  
Seem here no painful inch to gain,  
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,  
Comes silent, flooding in, the main."

*The Lord of Hosts, let Him be your fear, and let Him be your bread.*  
*Isa. viii. 12, 13.*

THE land was panic-stricken for fear of the coalition of Samaria and Damascus. The politicians were seeking the alliance of Assyria, whilst the superstitious had recourse to familiar spirits and wizards. Amid the panic the voice of Isaiah is heard bidding the people fear with only one kind of fear. Not *their* fear, but the fear of God; not *their* dread, but His. The apostle Peter quotes these words, when he says, "If ye should suffer for righteousness' sake, blessed are ye; and fear not their fear, neither be troubled; but sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord" (1 Pet. iii. 15, R. v.).

On the prairies men often fight fire with fire. Against the career of the wall of flame there is but one resource; before it reaches the terrified fugitives they must light a fire to sweep the ground bare, that when the advancing horror reaches the spot there will be no fuel left for it to feed on. So with the heart of man, the only true preservation from fear of our fellows is an overmastering fear of our God. Sanctify Him in your hearts. Let Him be your fear and dread.

It is remarkable that Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac. And this appears to have quieted his heart in the presence of Laban. When the fear of God is strong, the thought of grieving Him, or incurring His just wrath and indignation, is most cogent in warning us from sin! This delivers us from all other fear. One of the greatest sentences a man can utter when tempted to sin or threatened with suffering for the uprightness of his life or the correctness of his creed, is to say simply, quietly, and strongly: "I fear God, and have no other fear." Fear Him: so shall ye be established; so shall ye prosper.

*Of the increase of His government and peace  
there shall be no end.* *Isa. ix. 7.*

IS the government of your life upon His shoulder? In olden times the badge of office was worn there, and in some cases a key (xxii. 22). It was on His shoulder that Aaron bore the names of the tribes. The shoulder is the symbol of strength. It is well when the government of our lives rests on the strong Son of God. It is a blessed day in our experience that witnesses the transference of the rule of life to the Wonderful, the Counsellor, the Mighty God; because all these exalted altitudes of His nature well qualify Him to become the King and Guide of men.

The moment of definitely imposing the government upon the Lord Jesus is generally a marked one in our lives. It stands out as the first of a long series. It is the staple for a chain of successive links, because we are always increasing that government in proportion as we become more familiar with our nature and opportunities, and as new departments of our life open up before us. You were consecrated before marriage, but after you have a home of your own there is a widening of the sphere of Christ's government.

But just in proportion to the increase of His government will be the increase of your peace. As the one extends, so does the other. And he who has extended the dominion of Jesus to the furthest limits of his being, will know most of the peace that passeth understanding. There is Peace where there is Unity; where the soul has but one object to engross its love and aim; where it is able to count on the illimitable stores of its King.

“Yield to the Lord, with simple heart,  
All that thou hast and all thou art!  
Renounce all strength but strength divine,  
And Peace shall be forever thine!”



*Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith?*

*Isa. x. 15.*

THE Assyrian thought that he was acting on his own impulse, and in his pride congratulated himself on his exploits. The prophet reminded him that it was not so. He was only an axe, a saw, a rod, in the hand of the Eternal God whose supremacy he was inclined to challenge and set at nought.

This thought underlay the apostle's reply to those who magnified him against Appollos or Cephas. What are we, he cries, but ministers through whom ye believed, even as God granted to each of us? We are only instruments of God's husbandry, implements through which He fulfills His plans (1 Cor. iii.). It dates an era in the life, when we cease to work for God, and allow God to work through us.

Thoughts like these correct alike pride and despondency. *Pride*, because whatever is the result of our work, we can no more take the credit of it than the pen that wrote the "Paradise Lost" could take to itself the credit of its production. At the best, it is not you, but the grace of God that was with you. You are only a pipe in the organ, but the breath that educed your music was divine. And in *despondency* it is very helpful to remember that if we are nothing, God is all-sufficient; if we have failed, it is the more needful for Him to exert more power. Throw back the responsibility of all results on God. Only see to it that you are a polished shaft, an unblunted saw, and leave Him to do through you what He will.

"So, take and use thy work!

Amend what flaws may lurk,  
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!

My times are in thy hand!

Perfect the cup as plann'd!

Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same!"



*And he shall be of quick scent in the fear of the Lord.*  
*Isa. xi. 3 (R. V., marg.).*

QUICK of scent! This is the prerogative of all who have received the fullness of the Holy Spirit. We all know the great advantage of having a keen scent. Those who can instantly detect an ill-odor are saved from going into places where pestilence and fever lurk in ambush for life. The whiff of ill-odor startles the unwary passer-by, and warns him that influences inimical to health are brooding nigh. Thus he is arrested and saved.

It is a blessed thing when a man's spiritual senses are exercised to discriminate between the good and bad, the healthy and unhealthy, in literature, amusements, fellowship, and many of the questionable or doubtful things which professing Christians permit. There are many of these which appear innocent enough, like some deadly spot of a jungle where miasma and fever breed; but the deadly scent of corruption will instantly be detected by the Spirit-taught spirit, and the child of God, whose senses are exercised to distinguish between good and evil.

The sense of smell is greatly quickened by inhaling pure air, full of ozone and health, such as breathes about the mountain-brow or the ocean wave. If we return from such scenes, we are more sensitive than ever to foul odors. Live with God's Spirit in holy fellowship, so will you become spiritually quick of scent.

The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that our senses become quick to distinguish between good and evil by reason of use (Heb. v. 14). In the first stages of Christian living, temptation may have stolen in upon and mastered us before we were aware of its presence. But, as years pass, and we become mature through feeding on the meat of the Gospel we become "quick,"

*With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.*  
*Isa. xii. 3.*

*SALVATION in wells.* It is a fascinating picture. We remember Elim, for instance, where were twelve springs of water. In Jesus there are wells of salvation and blessedness. Do you want Sympathy? Draw it from His tears. Courage? It resides in our Cœur-de-Lion, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Purity? It is His lifeblood. Peace? He is the Prince of Peace, the Son of Peace. Meekness? He is meek and lowly in heart. Mercifulness? In Him you will obtain it. Prayerfulness? It is His prime characteristic. There is no quality or grace of the soul which has not its well of supply in the Divine Manhood of our Lord.

*But we must draw.* Thou hast something to draw with, though not to the eye of man. Faith is the bucket, which we let down into the fullness of the Divine supply. Not simply the general belief that God does answer prayer, but the specific and particular belief that God has answered the prayer for some special needed grace; and that it is yours. *Believe* that ye have received. Do not look into the dripping bucket of your faith to see if you have received; dare to believe that you have received whether you get it or not; and go forth to use what you have, sure that in answer to your appeal you have all sufficiency in all things, that you may abound to every good work.

*What joy!* There is always joy in some new discovery and acquisition. And oh, the joy of realizing that all the wealth of God's salvation is within our reach; that we may draw forever without fear of exhaustion; that the Spirit and Bride invite us to end forevermore our thirst, our disquiet, our weary quest!

*And Babylon shall be as when God overthrew  
Sodom and Gomorrah.*

*Isa. xiii. 19.*

THESE prophecies have been fulfilled with marvellous accuracy. It is a pity that so few of our young people in these days study the evidence of prophecy. "Keith's Evidences" would be a wholesome introduction to this marvellous field of investigation; but every year is adding to the store of proof. Unlike the evidence of miracles, that of prophecy increases with every year of increasing distance from the hour that the prediction was given.

There is a God that judgeth in the earth. Nations, as well as individuals, must stand before His judgment bar. Indeed, the judgment of the nations is now in progress. Already before the Son of Man all nations are being gathered, and He is dividing the sheep from among the goats. Men do not see the sentence of the Divine Judge put into execution, since the operation of His Providence is so deliberate. But in the landscape of history, as we view it from the eminence of the years, we can detect the condign vengeance of the Almighty on the cruel, rapacious, blood-thirsty kingdom of Babylon. She had served God's purpose, but she had committed such enormous crimes in the process of serving it, that she must be condemned.

The wrongs of the West Indians have, in this generation, been requited upon Spain. It is not possible that modern Turkey should escape. The blood of 100,000 Armenians cries against her from under the altar. But let our beloved country beware! Her opium traffic, her connivance at the sale of fire-water to native races, her permission of gross impurity in her streets, her drunkenness, must be telling very heavily against her in the scale of Divine justice. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!"

*The Lord will have compassion on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel.*  
*Isa. xiv. 1.*

ISRAEL is the pivot around which the history of the world revolves. We cannot understand the trend of events till we know this. As it was in the days of Isaiah, so it is now. Then the rise and fall of Babylon was conditioned by the history of the people whom her kings so greatly despised. Israel needed punishment, and Babylon was raised up to be the rod of God's vengeance. The precious truths entrusted to Israel needed dissemination throughout the world, and the chosen people were carried captive to Babylon and scattered throughout that vast empire. When seventy years were fulfilled, and the time was ripe for their restoration to their own land, Babylon fell beneath the Medes and Persians, and Cyrus signed the edict for the restoration of Israel.

So, now, it is hardly a matter of doubt that the existing complications of Eastern Europe will never be settled until the chosen people recover the land given by covenant-promise to Abraham, and establish there a free and independent kingdom.

But the practical lesson is, that God bears His people on His heart, and that He is ever engaged in manipulating and governing human affairs for their welfare. He hates putting away. He must keep His promises made to us in Jesus. O backslider, what comfort for thee is here! Israel had surely done her worst to alienate the love of God, and to put herself out of His loving favor. But see how He had compassion and chose her again. Take heart! He will restore thee, as at the first, and bless thee, setting thee again in the old place of favor and privilege. "Return unto Me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts."

*My heart crieth out for Moab.*

*Isa. xv. 5 (R. V.).*

MOAB was once thickly populated, and very fertile. But the country is now strewn with ruins; a few broken shafts of columns alone are standing, and deep wells cut into the heart of rock. That such a civilization should pass so entirely away, leaving no trace behind it, must have seemed most unlikely to the prophet's contemporaries; but these words have been literally fulfilled. So shall others of prophecy be fulfilled; and, indeed, each morning's dawn witnesses some further approach to their accomplishment.

It is to be noticed that the man of God takes no pleasure in these desolations, though Israel and Moab had been perpetually at feud. He speaks of the *burden* of Moab. Is not this the manner in which we should consider and proclaim the doom of the ungodly? Oh to preach of eternal judgment with wet eyes! Oh to tell men, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ! Oh to know the burdened heart, burdened even to breaking!

This is the only preaching which touches the heart of the unsaved. To announce their doom with metallic voice and unperturbed manner will only harden; but to speak with streaming eyes, and the eloquence of a broken heart, will touch the most callous. It is the broken heart that breaks hearts. Tears start tears. May our merciful High Priest impart to us His compassion and mercies, and lay on our hearts some of His burdens for dying men; that as we behold the cities we may weep, and that there may be a trembling in our voices as we proclaim the fearful woe that awaits the godless and impenitent.

*And a throne shall be established in mercy.*

*Isa. xvi. 5 (R. V.).*

IN those days thrones were not generally established in mercy; but in blood, and cruelty, and savage might. Addressing Moab, the prophet advises that in the hour of her anguish, when her fugitives gather at the fords of the Arnon, in their mad flight from before the conqueror, they should make peace with their ancient enemies the Jews, and appease their hatred, that the outcasts may find shelter in the Land of Promise. And he goes on to say, that when this should come to pass, their piteous appeal for protection will be generously met, because the throne shall at that time be established in mercy. The ancient causes of enmity will be forgotten; the old feuds will be condoned; and the protection of Israel will be to the trembling crowds of refugees like the shadow of a high rock flung across the sand, when all the land is baking in the noontide glare.

Who can this be that sits on the throne of David, combining mercy with truth, seeking righteousness in His judgment, and swift to act on the behalf of the oppressed? None other than the Prince of the House of David, of whose kingdom there can be no end. Art thou a fugitive, driven from thy nest, and rushing to and fro as a scared and trembling bird (2)? Is the glare of the sun scorching thee? Dost thou stand at the fords of Arnon, with enemies behind, and death in front? Send ye lambs to the Mount of Zion; make peace with her King; invoke His forgiveness and salvation. Remember that though He is a great King, His throne is established in mercy. And His shadow shall be as the night in the midst of the noonday; He will hide the outcast, and will not betray the wanderer (3.)



*The harvest fleeth away in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow.*      *Isa. xvii. 10, 11 (R. v.).*

HOW many among us might be addressed in these solemn words! Many are planting pleasant plants, which they hope will one day be beautiful in appearance; whilst from the slips they hope to rear fruit trees. One man is planting his schemes for making a fortune; another is setting slips that should bring him success and renown; yet another is busy in creating a political or religious movement that is intended to benefit mankind. The workers in the village allotment gardens in the early spring are an apt illustration of what politicians, company-monsters, and society-leaders, are attempting in other spheres.

But of what avail are all our preparations, so long as we forget the God of our salvation and are unmindful of the Rock of our strength? We shall never garner the harvest without His help and blessing. The day of grief and desperate sorrow will inevitably visit us, and sweep away all the results of our toils. The coöperation and blessing of God, sought in answer to prayer, cannot be left out of our calculations, if we are to win lasting success.

And is not the reverse also true? Supposing that we remember the God of our salvation, and are ever mindful of the Rock of our strength: may we not infer that our pleasant plants will root themselves, and our slips bear fruit in the coming years to the glory and praise of God, and for the blessing of thirsty wayfarers? "These simple teachings of farm and field knock continually at the doors of our own blessedness, with intent that we may enter therein, and find our home in the will of God, and our permanent lodging under the shadow of the Almighty."

*I will be still, and I will behold in my dwelling-place.*

*Isa. xviii. 4 (R. V.).*

ASSYRIA was marching against Ethiopia, the people of which are described as tall and smooth. And as the armies advance, God makes no effort to arrest them; it would seem as though they will be allowed to work their will. He is still watching them from His dwelling-place; the sun still shines on them; the dews refresh them. But before the harvest, when the flowers are becoming ripening grapes, the whole of the proud array of Assyria is smitten as easily as when sprigs are cut off by the pruning-hook of the husbandman.

Is not this a marvellous conception of God—being still and watching? His stillness is not acquiescence. His silence is not consent. He is only biding His time, and will arise, in the most opportune moment, and when the designs of the wicked seem on the point of success, to overwhelm them with disaster. As we look out on the evil of the world; as we think of the apparent success of wrongdoing; as we wince beneath the oppression of those that hate us, let us remember these marvellous words about God being still and beholding.

There is, however, another side to this. Jesus beheld His disciples toiling at the oars through the stormy night; and watched, though unseen, the successive steps of the anguish at Bethany, where Lazarus slowly passed through the stages of mortal sickness, till he succumbed and was borne to the rocky tomb. But He was only waiting the moment when He could interpose most effectually. Is He still to thee? He is not unobservant: He is beholding all things: He has His finger on thy pulse, keenly sensitive to all its fluctuations. He will come to save thee when the precise moment has arrived.



*Egypt my people, Assyria the work of my hands,  
Israel mine inheritance.* *Isa. xix. 24, 25.*

It is very wonderful to find such expressions in the mouth of a Jew. It shows what an effect that coal of fire had produced on the lips of Isaiah. It had led him to know something of the love of God which overleaps the barriers of nationality and caste, and gives itself to all who humbly seek after Him.

We have here the foreshadowing of an age, yet to be revealed, when the long discipline of God's dealings with men shall be consummated in their conversion to God. What a radiant prospect is thus suggested to us, when the most inveterate enemies of God's Church shall be received into her borders and regarded with the favor that God shows to His people! Who, standing amid the terrors of the plagues, could ever have supposed that Egypt would be addressed as "my people"? Who could have thought that Assyria, the tyrant persecutor, would ever be called "the work of my hands"? Yet these are the trophies and triumphs of Divine grace. Our Shepherd has many sheep, which are not of the Jewish fold: these also He must bring; and there shall be one flock, one Shepherd. Never despair of any, for God's grace abounds over mountains.

But Israel is always His inheritance. There He finds rest and home, for the Lord's portion is His people. Oh to know the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints! The soil of our life is poor and thin, the aspect bad, the stones many; but He who chose us will yet vindicate Himself, and if He has to empty heaven of its wealth He will do it rather than fail of His eternal purpose. Naaman asked for two mules' burdens of earth; but Christ can spare more than that, and will, to make the soil of a godly character.

*And we, how shall we escape?*

*Isa. xx. 6 (R. V.).*

THE argument is as follows—Assyria, according to Isaiah's prophecies, would sweep down on Ethiopia, and take them into captivity; and when this happened, the inhabitants of the coast-line, which we know as Philistia, would have reason to fear indeed. If Ethiopia and Egypt, to whom they looked for aid, could not withstand the mighty northern nation, how hopeless it was for dwellers on the littoral to expect to withstand it by themselves!

The moral is obvious, and it is well pointed by the apostle Peter when he says: "The time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God, and if it begin first with us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the Gospel of God? And if the righteous is scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?" Scarcely saved! It is as though our salvation tasked the resources of the Eternal God to the uttermost. He had grace and strength enough, but none to spare. Blood and tears and heart-break were the price with which our redemption was secured! How then will they escape who venture forth into the storm which soon shall break upon our world, apart from the only salvation which can withstand its fury? "If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"

A pious man, when death approached, longed to die in triumph for the conversion of his sons. Instead, his soul was overwhelmed with gloom. But this was used of God to the conversion of the whole family, for they said: If so good a man died in the dark, what will become of *us*?

## *Watchman, what of the night?*

*Isa. xxi. 11.*

ACROSS the desert spaces a voice was heard calling from the land of Esau, calling to the prophet, to know whether the long night of Assyrian oppression was nearly over. He stood on the hills of Zion watching the dawn, as the priests were accustomed to do, that they might give the first signal for the offering of the morning sacrifice. The question, "Watchman, what of the night?" was repeated twice, as if the weary sufferers were at their last gasp.

The prophet's answer was enigmatical. The morning was already on its way; but the night was chasing it, spreading her raven wings in the same sky—"The morning cometh, and also the night." Morning for Israel, but night for Edom; but if Edom would repent, she might come again with her inquiries to find that for her also God had turned the shadow of death into the morning.

Never in the history of the ages have men looked more eagerly toward the Eastern sky, or inquired more persistently, What of the night? What of the night? To those that watch the Eastern sky, standing on the mount of vision afforded by the Word of God, there is but one answer: The morning cometh, but also the night. The morning of millennial glory, and of the bridal chamber; of the taking home of the saints, and the revelation of Jesus Christ: but the night of unutterable sorrow to the servant who knew the Lord's will and did it not, and to the world which would not have this Man to reign over it. Yet if individuals will but turn from darkness to light, and from Satan to God, they will be welcomed, and receive an inheritance amongst the children of the morning. "Come ye again, come" (R. v., *marg.*).

*The key of the house of David will I lay upon  
His shoulder.* *Isa. xxii. 22.*

THE Divine Man stands behind the earthly type in these words in majestic beauty. "These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and none shall shut, and that shutteth and none openeth. Behold, I have set before thee a door opened, which none can shut." Words of incomparable splendor, capable of endless application.

Let Jesus open each day of service, each opportunity of ministry, each door into another soul, each new chamber of life, and knowledge, and opportunity; and remember that He who sets before us open doors is He who knows our works, and that we have but little strength. He will never open a door leading into a passage of life which is too difficult for our strength to tread. The open door will reveal to us possibilities within our reach of which we had not dreamed; and when once a door is opened, though access to it may be beset, as in Bunyan's vision, by armed men, and though strong pressure is brought to bear upon it for its closing, let us dare to persevere against disease and pestilence and opposition, relying on these sublime words, *None shall shut*. Dear soul, say it to thyself repeatedly, *None shall shut*.

But the Lord shuts doors. "The Spirit of Jesus suffered them not to go into Bithynia." Down a long corridor of closed doors we may sometimes have to pass. It seems heartbreaking to see doors labelled, Friendship, Love, Home, shut against us; but beyond them there is the one unclosed door through which we shall enter into our true life. Oh do not lose heart and hope in useless weeping over the closed doors of the past. Follow Him, who has the keys.

*The sea hath spoken.*

*Isa. xxiii. 4.*

ZIDON is bidden to be ashamed because she is suddenly left childless ; and this to an Eastern woman was shame indeed. And the prophet, personifying Zidon as the City of the Sea, describes the sea herself as lamenting. It is as though the sea took up Zidon's complaint at the destruction of her children, and spoke in all her multitudinous waves.

With what different tones the sea speaks ! Sometimes in the musical breath of her wavelets on the beach ; or the long drawl of the shingle in the recession of the retiring billow ; or in the rising storm, when the waters lift up their voice ; or in the angry roar of the mighty waves far out at sea. Speaking in whispers and in thunder ; speaking to itself and to God under the canopy of night ! The sea-voices are not the least amongst those of nature. Old Ocean seems to us sometimes like a great organ on which every note of the heart is represented.

And what are the wild waves saying ? Listen ! "We are His, for He made us ; we own His sway, for He once trod our crests ; His voice is as the voice of many waters ; His thoughts are deep as our profoundest depths ; His throne stands beside the sea of glass mingled with fire ; His least word is omnipotent over our wildest fury."

But the sea shall one day speak for the last time. The lonely soul of the beloved apostle, which had so often listened to the chime of the Ægean waves around his island prison, rejoiced to know that the sea should one day be no more. No more the speech of the storm ; no more the mournful cadence of the retiring wavelet at night telling of separation and loneliness. "The first heaven and the first earth are passed away, and the sea is no more."

*From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs.*

*Isa. xxiv. 16.*

THIS chapter exceeds in sublimity. The prophet first describes the general desolation about to overtake the world of his time, when, through the ruthless invasions of Nebuchadnezzar, it would become utterly emptied and spoiled. He describes the earth as languishing and fading away, and the high ones of the people languishing (ver. 4). Polluted nature is depicted as groaning in bitter anguish beneath the enormous sins of men, who had transgressed the law, changed the ordinance, and broken the everlasting covenant of their God. All joy is darkened ; the mirth of the land is gone.

The scene is changed, and our thought is turned from the judgment and punishment of the wicked, to the blessed lot of the people of God ; we are taught to see the Lord of Hosts reigning on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before His ancients gloriously. And all who see it are compelled to confess that it is well with His people who are under such a King. And as that spectacle is beheld by the sons of men, as they compare their misery with the light and joy of the people of God, they lift up their voices and sing. They shall lift up their voice, they shall shout ; for the majesty of the Lord, they shall cry aloud from the sea. Where morning lights her fires they shall glorify Him ; and from the uttermost parts of the earth songs roll home in a tumult of ecstasy, "Glory, glory to the righteous."

It is a true sentence. Though for our discipline, and to fit us to minister to men, we are often passed through the fiery furnace, yet on the whole it is well with us. Ours is the peace of God ; ours the knowledge that love is over all ; ours the anticipation of a morning that shall never be overcast.



*He will swallow up death in victory.*

*Isa. xxv. 8.*

IN this ode, which Isaiah prepared for singing when Babylon the first should have fallen, the apostle, taught by the Holy Ghost, saw an anticipation of the triumph of the saints, when the strong bastions of death should be destroyed before the coming of Him who is the resurrection and the life. "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." In these words he refers to the first stage in the Second Advent, when the living saints shall be changed, and those who have died shall be raised; and then he proceeds to quote these words, "When this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

There can be no doubt that this is Paul's prayer for himself. He says, "We would be clothed upon, that what is mortal may be swallowed up of life." No doubt it would be very delightful! None of the pains of dissolution; no going forth of the unclothed spirit; but the sudden subliming and transfiguring of the mortal, as ice passes into water, or water into vapor. It is not to be wondered at that the prophet adds, "The Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces." In the rapture of reunion, in the glad embrace of eternity, in the consciousness that death and trouble are forever behind, and that God has kept His word, we shall forget how to weep!

The prophet also records the triumphant song which will break from myriads of glad spirits, when the hope of the Church will be realized, and her long patience rewarded: "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God: we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee.* *Isa. xxvi. 3.*

THE Hebrew is very significant. "Perfect peace" is *Peace, peace*. As though the soul dwelt within double doors, like some chambers which we have entered, which had double windows against the noise of the street, and a baize door within the ordinary one to deaden the sound of voices from the next apartment. Understand, dear soul, that it is thy privilege to live inside the double doors of God's loving care. He says to thee, "Peace, peace." If one assurance is not enough, He will follow it with a second and a third. The city is strong, the bulwarks and walls are massive, salvation is appointed and prepared; but the gates do not frown with iron or move heavily on hinges of stone, they open musically and gently.

We remember how, on the evening of His resurrection, our Lord spoke the double peace. Peace, because of His wounds, the peace of the justified; and peace, because He was sending His apostles forth, as the Father had sent Him. The one is the peace of the evening, when we come back to our home, wounded and soiled: the other of the morning, when we dwell in the will of Him who chose our lot and path. His blood and His will—these are the double doors of our peace.

We must see to it that our mind is stayed on God. For *mind* the margin suggests *imagination*. It is through our imaginings that we get perturbed and defiled. We anticipate and fancy so many ogres; we harbor such dark forebodings; chambers of imagery are thrown open to such unseemly company; hence our perturbation. Do not imagine, but trust; do not anticipate, but leave God to choose. "Looking forward strains the eyesight; looking upward opens heaven."



*Let him take hold of My strength.*

*Isa. xxvii. 5.*

SUCH are the alternatives. You must either resist God's strength, or take hold of it. If the former, it is as though thorns and briars should fight flame. 'There is no fury in God; He has no desire for the death of the ungodly, but that he should turn from his unrighteousness and live. Yet if the blinded soul persists in flinging itself into collision with Him, it must suffer finally and irretrievably. But notice the double invitation, "Let him take hold of My strength; let him make peace."

Where shall I find His strength? the sinner asks. In the mighty mountains girded with strength; in the arch of the sky; in the break of the ocean wave? No, not in these; but where that dying Man pours out His soul unto death, and is numbered with the transgressors. But surely *there* is the *weakness* of God, not the strength! Nay, but it is the strength. The weakness of God is stronger than men. "We preach Christ crucified: to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, Christ the power of God."

Come hither, soul of man, the strength of God is in that pierced, transfixed hand. Take hold of it, it will lift thee. In Him God is reconciled; there is nothing to do but take the offered mercy, accept His reconciliation, and be at peace. God is reconciled; be thou reconciled. God has made peace; be thou at peace. God reaches out His hand; take hold of it. God draws nigh; draw nigh to Him. Then He will keep thee, whatever be thy foes or temptations; His protecting strength will interpose between them and thee. He will keep thee night and day (ver. 3).

"Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin?  
The blood of Jesus whispers peace within."

*A crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty.*

*Isa. xxviii. 5.*

WHAT many, like the drunkards of Ephraim, as described here, seek in the exhilarating stimulus of wine, God's people seek and find in Himself! Notice the variety of His attributes. There is something for every one. Are you eager for glory? There is no reputation or fame equal to having His smile, the consciousness of being well pleasing to Him—"He will be a crown of glory." Do you recognize the deformity and unloveliness of your character, and desire beauty? "He will be a diadem of beauty." Do you desire a right judgment in all things, so as to be able to direct large and important undertakings? "He will be a spirit of judgment," when you will be in judgment. Submit your judgment to Him, that He may think through your mind, or direct you to a just conclusion. Are there days when the enemy threatens to carry your soul by assault, and is already at the gates? Then turn to Jesus, and He will be your strength. Yes, and in great crises, when evil is predominant, and the citadel of faith and righteousness threatens to be submerged before the weltering chaos, when no other help is near, as you look to the Captain of the Lord's Host, you will suddenly find yourself enabled to roll back the dark battalions, in the very hour of victory.

Let us live in closer fellowship with our glorious Lord. They who receive the abundance of His grace shall reign. Out of His fullness may all receive, and grace for grace. "In that day" on Christ's lips always meant the day of Pentecost; and it is only through the grace of the Holy Spirit that we can avail ourselves of the treasured resources of the Ascended Christ.

He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed,"

*The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord.*

*Isa. xxix. 19.*

“ BLESSED are the meek,” “ Blessed are the poor in spirit,” said the Lord. What is meekness, and why are weak and poor men so signally blessed with joy? Meekness is different from lowliness and humility. It is our attitude in the presence of our detractors and persecutors—not retaliating, nor opposing force to force, but bowing in silence and submission before high-handed wrong. It was in such a spirit of meekness that Jesus suffered Himself to be led as a lamb to the slaughter; and instead of calling for legions of angels, suffered Caiaphas’ armed band to bind Him. This spirit is not natural to us. It is in our nature to retaliate and avenge ourselves. We want to call for fire, or legions of armored angels from the heaven of God. But this is not the way of peace or joy.

But the Holy Spirit waits to reproduce in us the meekness of Jesus. Then, when you meet all injury and unkindness with an unfailing Christian courtesy, bending like a rush before the storm, to rise when it has passed over, you will have joy. Joy, because God will comfort you: because you have not lost yourself in the heat of passion, but have tried to turn others away from their evil purpose: because your hands could not have vindicated or extricated yourself, as God’s have: and because you realize that the passive virtues are stronger, and the patience of Jesus Christ will win the kingdom. Those who fret and fume and storm through life, always standing on their rights, and insisting on being respected and consulted, are in perpetual perturbation. But the meek inherit the earth. All the best comes to them at last. God makes them His special charge. And as they tread the path of Jesus, they share His joy.

*Therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you.*

*Isa. xxx. 18.*

AS long as the people tried to help themselves, sending ambassadors to Egypt, and seeking an alliance against the invader, God could do nothing for them; He could only wait until they returned to simple reliance upon Himself. In returning to trust and rest they would be saved. At first they said No. They were opposed to the idea of simple trust in God. It seemed impossible to believe that if they simply rested on Him He would do better for them than their most strenuous exertions could do for themselves. And all the while God was waiting till every expedient failed, and they were reduced to such a condition that He could step in and save them.

How like this is too much in our lives! It is long before we learn the lesson of returning and rest; of quietness and confidence. We will trust in chariots and horses, and ride upon the swift. It is, of course, right to use the means; but our strong temptation is to put them in the place of God, and trust them. You are trying to save yourself from the just penalty of your sin, from the pursuit of your foes, from perplexing combinations and complications of circumstances; you have been running backward and forward, flurried and excited. At how many doors you have knocked to find them closed; and all the while God has been waiting to be gracious to you, waiting till you came to the end of yourself; waiting, till like a spent struggler in the water, you ceased from your mad efforts and cast yourself back upon His strong everlasting love. He is exalted to have mercy; but He is a God of judgment, or literally, of method. He can only save in one way. Blessed are they that wait for Him. The soul that waits for God will always find the God for whom he waits.

*As birds flying, so will the Lord of Hosts protect Jerusalem.*  
*Isa. xxxi. 5 (R. V.).*

IT was a beautiful conception, for Jerusalem was perched on Mount Zion, as some bird's nest in the cleft of the rocks. Lo! Sennacherib approaches as the hawk, hovering above the fledglings of the nest. But just as the mother-bird gathers her young under her wing, and places herself between her treasures and threatening peril, so would the eternal God spread those wings, under which Ruth came to trust in the old time, over the entire city. To Isaiah there was no cause for fear when Sennacherib's legions were encamped on the mountains of Zion. He, at least, realized that the pinions of Almightyness were between the cowering citizens and the dreaded foe. Warm and safe was such abiding.

How wonderful that Jesus should have appropriated this metaphor, and spoken of Himself as willing to gather Jerusalem under His wing to save her from a more terrible fate! Does it not bespeak His consciousness of Deity that He should hide the people under the shadow of His care?

This may be our daily portion. The Lord of Hosts will be strong as the lion that growls over his prey, undismayed by the multitude of shepherds that shout at him; and He will be sweet and soft and gentle as a mother-bird. Always believe that Jesus stands between you and what you dread. Even now He is passing over you. Do you not hear Him saying, "If you seek Me, let these go their way"? Isaac Pennington, an old follower of George Fox, who had considerable experience of the prisons of his time, said he often felt the healing drop from the wings of Christ. The sense of God's presence and of His power are as two wings, beneath which the believer nestles, till calamities be overpast.

*The work of righteousness shall be peace.*

*Isa. xxxii. 17.*

RIGHTEOUSNESS must precede peace. *In the government of a Holy God.* The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews clearly affirms that Melchizedek, the type of Christ, is first King of Righteousness and *then* King of Peace. In Rom. iii. the apostle shows how the righteousness of God has been vindicated, and will be imparted to those that believe; and then says, "Being justified, . . . let us have peace with God."

*In our inner life.* Many seek for peace apart from righteousness. They refuse to adjust some wrong in their lives which calls aloud against them. They refuse to permit the light of God's Spirit to ransack their past, because they are conscious that to do so will expose themselves to the inevitable need of confession and restitution; and as they will not submit to the laying of the foundations of peace, they miss the peace. So far as you know, you must be right, before you can have peace.

*In men's dealings with each other.* Be sure to go to the bottom of disputes and disagreements. There is a right and a wrong in every question. It is always wise to lay the foundations of justice at any cost, assured that peace will inevitably result sooner or later. Honeyed words will not abide; but just deeds are a permanent basis for a happy and lasting reconciliation.

How blessed that forevermore our peace is secured! The righteous shall never need to leave their peaceful habitation, or to quit their sure dwellings. However it may hail to the downfall of the forest trees, storms shall never drive them from their quiet resting-places, since they are founded upon the righteousness as well as the grace of God.



*Be Thou their arm every morning, our salvation  
also in the time of trouble.*      *Isa. xxxiii. 2.*

THIS is an exquisite morning prayer, and the beauty of it is that it is so sweetly unselfish. It begins by appealing for the grace of God, but goes on to ask that He would be as an arm of loving support and deliverance to others, before the suppliant turns back to ask for salvation for himself in time of trouble. "Be Thou *their* arm; . . . *our* salvation also." If you want God's arm for yourself, ask that it may be given to some one else. If you want salvation in the time of trouble, pray that God would give His arm for the help of your neighbor.

We all want that arm every morning. The gladdest, fairest day that ever broke for us, or will break, must have been marked, or will be marked, by pitfalls and snares. The path may begin with greensward; but before the evening it will have opened upon stones and steep ascents, and you will need the arm of your Beloved on which to lean. But you will never ask for it in vain. It will be always at hand. Be sure, like the Shulamite, to come up out of the wilderness, leaning on your Beloved. And whatever else you forget in your morning prayer, never forget to ask for the strong, tender arm of God. O woman, bereaved of the strong arm on which thou wert wont to lean, will not this suffice thee!

Is not this a comprehensive prayer for dear ones far away or near? Be their arm, Heavenly Father, to-day. If I may not be there to give the strength of my arm, let thine be their stay, and Thou wilt do better than had been possible, had I been by their side. Then, when the hour of trouble comes, and you ask that He should be your salvation, the glorious Lord will be a place of broad rivers and streams.

*The day of the Lord's vengeance, the year of recompense.*

*Isa. xxxiv. 8 (R. V.).*

THESE chapters remind us that there is a God that judgeth in the earth. The tendency of the present day is to reduce all things to the operation of natural law, and to crowd God out of His own world ; as though He had no longer as much power as a judge or magistrate to inflict punishment ! Here He comes out of the silence of eternity to avenge the wrongs of His people perpetrated upon them by Edom. The Jews could never forget that when they were in the extremity of their conflict with Babylon, Edom rejoiced and said, " Raze it, raze it to the foundation thereof." Now, at length, God would vindicate His people, and punish the proud land whose sins cried to Heaven.

Let us remember that God works not only through natural law, but by sudden manifest interpositions of His providence ; and when He arises on behalf of the meek, the result is not only terrible but lasting. It seems as though God's judgment on Edom and other peoples, which has left their lands as desolate scars on the face of the earth, are instances of the permanence of God's decrees, and of their irreversibility : " The smoke thereof shall go up forever ; from generation to generation it shall be waste ; none shall pass through it forever and ever." It was often told by the Waldenses, how the prince that broke the covenant with them and drove them across the Swiss mountains, died of a broken heart at the death of his first-born.

God does not appear always to avenge the wrongs of His people in the present life. The wicked pass away amid their ill-gotten prosperity, but in the next world their evil deeds come back to roost in their own hearts.



## *The way of holiness.*

*Isa. xxxv. 8.*

THIS chapter is full of blessed prevision of a state of perfect blessedness, when the curse that has so long brooded over the world shall be removed. Into that sweet and blessed country there is a way from the present : it is the way of holiness.

*It is a way.* Our holiness is progressive. Though we may perfectly obey up to the limit of our knowledge, that knowledge is ever on the increase, beckoning our advance. Before us lies the path marked out by the footsteps of Jesus, climbing from strength to strength, and we are called to walk in it.

*It is a highway.* That is, it is for every one that will. It is kept in repair under the King's own orders. There are no toll-gates on its straight line of route. It is like those Roman roads which traversed countries from end to end, and remain to-day imperishable monuments of the skill of their constructors.

*It is closed against the unclean.* The leper of old was forbidden to obstruct the thoroughfare. The unclean soul is equally forbidden to taint that holy way. God's first requirement of us is separation.

*This way is always trodden by Jesus.* "He shall be with them" (R. v., *marg.*). The holy soul has a Divine Companion. For the most part those who tread this way do so as part of a great host ; but when the path seems lonely, He goes beside who walked to Emmaus.

*It is plainly defined.* Wayfaring men, though fools, need make no mistake. Be true to the Bible, to the holy instincts of your soul, and, above all, to the blessed Comforter who guides all. The way may sometimes be paved with jagged flints ; but keep in it, it is safe walking, and it leads home.

*They held their peace, and answered him not a word.*

*Isa. xxxvi. 21.*

IT was very bitter for Hezekiah and Isaiah that these words of vituperation and abuse were spoken in the open air, the voice of the speaker travelling far enough to be heard by the whole population in Jerusalem. Rabshakeh loudly reminded them that Egypt was a broken reed; then suggested that Hezekiah's recent raid against the idolatry which had grown up in his country must have alienated the God of Israel; then that God Himself had sent him to destroy the land; and lastly, he quoted the long list of conquests that had fallen to the share of his master. What could Hezekiah do against the conqueror of Sepharvaim and other proud cities, which were level with the ground? To all of which the king ordered they should give no reply.

Silence is our best reply to the allegations and taunts of our foes. Be still, O persecuted soul! Hand over thy cause to God. It is useless to argue, even in many cases to give explanations. Be still, and commit thy cause to God. He has heard every word, and will answer. Thus Jesus also held His peace, when falsely accused:

“ He stood alone,  
Silent amidst their clamor—He whose voice  
Of power but late suffic'd to ope the grave!  
‘Others He saved—Himself He cannot save!’  
O mystic silence! how divine thy choice.”

But before going into this conflict be sure that, like Hezekiah, thou hast put from thee all that is false and evil. The iconoclasm of the good king which Rabshakeh so curiously misinterpreted was, after all, his main security. It is necessary that there should be no controversy between God and the soul which He is to defend.

*Hezekiah went unto the house of the Lord, and spread the letter before the Lord. Isa. xxxvii. 14.*

PROBABLY he literally handed in the letter to God, opening it and laying it down in the Holy Place, as though the responsibility of dealing with its contents no longer devolved upon himself.

The post and telegraph are great factors in modern life. They are perpetually bringing to us documents of one kind and another, which involve anxious thought. Sometimes a heavy account for expenditure which has been necessarily and righteously incurred; or a story of wrongdoing on the part of some near relative; or some piteous appeal for help. Indeed, not unseldom, letters like this that Rabshakeh addressed to Hezekiah may fall into our lap. We read with beating hearts, and know not what to say, and finally go into the presence of God and spread it out. Answer it for us, great God, we entreat Thee!

The Divine reply came first in the blessed assurance sent through Isaiah; and next when the angel of the Lord "spread his wings on the blast, and breathed on the face of the foe as he passed." Let us more habitually hand over our anxieties and cares to God. God calls us to enter into His rest, *i. e.*, to place Himself and His care between us and all that would hurt or annoy. "Doth God take care for oxen," and will He not care for His children? Is a falling sparrow more to Him than His child? Hath He brought us so far on our journey to put us to shame? Only let us be sure that we have given no just cause for the unkind tone of the letters, or brought ourselves into a false position with respect to those who hate God. Daily exercise yourself to have a conscience void of offence: then with God on your side, you can face a world in arms.

THE R. V. margin is very beautiful. "Thou hast loved my soul from the pit." As though from the pit's mouth and onward there had been one long succession of loving thoughts and words. Or it may be that the love of God has loved us out to the pit of corruption. Let that pit of corruption stand for the evil of our own hearts, the abysmal depths of our selfishness, the lustings and fightings of our flesh. What could have saved us from all these, but the love of God?

*The Patience of God's love.*—God's patience has been greatly magnified in us, that He has borne with us so tenderly. If God had been less than infinite, He must long ago have renounced us in despair. Oh, the riches of His long-suffering! He has lingered near the pit of our corruption, drawing us from it with untiring solicitude, even when we have repeatedly cast ourselves back into it with ungrateful persistence.

*The Sacrifices of God's love.*—How much He has borne and suffered! The cross, with its shame and spitting, seems to be but a revelation, in terms that we can understand, of the pain that lies always on His heart, and of the inestimable cost our sin involves. It is this Divine sorrow which purifies us, as we devoutly consider it.

*The Purity of God's love.*—What a contrast between some fetid pool and the over-arching blue of heaven! Such is God's love as contrasted with our hate; His sweetness with our chidings, His holiness with our corruption. But His love conquers our sin, and draws us out of the pit. Where sin abounds, His grace much more abounds, and makes us loving and lovely.

"Thou art the victor, Love!"

*There is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them.*

*Isa. xxxix. 4.*

IN the Book of the Chronicles there is a suggestion which shows the hidden evil that lurked beneath Hezekiah's attitude to these Babylonish ambassadors. "Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up, therefore there was wrath upon him." Beyond all other sin, pride is abhorrent to God as the parent of other sins, and it was this accursed principle that prompted Hezekiah to that ourburst of ostentation. He did not care to remember that he had nothing which he had not first received, and that at the best he was only a trustee of God's gifts for others. You will remember that by this sin fell the angels. It was when Nebuchadnezzar surveyed Babylon from the roof of his palace that he was suddenly smitten with madness.

Be very careful to watch against ostentation and the pride from which it springs. The best antidote is the habit of looking from the gifts to the Giver, and to accustom yourself to the position of a steward of the benefits which have been done to you. Oh for more of the spirit of praise and thanksgiving, of adoring gratitude, of grateful love! Not unto us, not unto us, but unto Thy name be all the glory, O Lord God. All things come of Thee: wealth, and the power to get it; love, and the qualities that earn it; success, and the health of body and mind so needful to its acquisition. No doubt Hezekiah's sad lapse is intended as a warning to us all. The minuteness with which it is recorded may be intended to impress on us the danger of coquetting with the Babylon around us. It is impossible to do so without becoming ultimately carried into captivity to its corruption.

*Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God.*

*Isa. xl. 1.*

THERE is a considerable interval between the preceding chapter and this. The Jews are now nearing the term of their long and bitter sufferings; their fiery trials have done their work.

*Comfort, because sin is forgiven.*—"Look to the wounds of Jesus, brother," said Staupitz to Luther. At the foot of the cross alone can sinners be comforted. We need not only the assurance of forgiveness, but some knowledge of the way in which it has been obtained, and the grounds on which it is based. Our hearts are never truly comforted till we learn that God is faithful and just when He forgives.

*Comfort, because God is on His way to deliver.*—The imagery is borrowed from the progress of an Oriental prince or conqueror. Great gangs of men are sent to level the ways before him. Be of good cheer, the prophet says; your God shall come with a strong hand. See the mountains become a way; the crooked is made straight and the rough places smooth. The glorious Lord comes to deliver the afflicted from His strong oppressor, and all flesh shall see it together.

*Comfort, because the Strong Deliverer has a tender heart.*—He comes as a mighty one, but He feeds His flock like a shepherd. Strong and sweet, mighty and merciful. The Everlasting Father, but the Prince of Peace. Those arms sustain the universe, but they gather lambs.

*Comfort, because He faints not, neither is weary.*—Others may tire after a while. Physical strength droops and declines. Time seems long. The current may sweep lovers and friends out of our reach, but Thou remainest! "The Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary."

*Look not around thee, for I am thy God.*

*Isa. xli. 10 (R. V., marg.).*

WE are all tempted *to look around* us, to see who is prepared to stand by and help us. We are apt, like the apostle, to look at the winds and waves. Not so, says our God. Look not around, but look off to Me; look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.

These exceeding great and precious promises quicken our desire to be able to establish our lineage as belonging to Abraham. We very gladly catch at the apostle's assurance that those who have his faith may claim to be his children. It is good to know that, Gentiles as we are, we may be included in the Israel of God.

Now, troubled soul, look unto these words. They are spoken by one who cannot lie, and spoken for thee. They are as much meant for thee as though they had never been claimed by another; and God is prepared to fulfill them in thy life to the brim. He is with thee at this moment, whilst thou art pondering these words. He is thy God, and will never act unworthily of thy trust. Where thou art weakest and most easily overcome, He will strengthen thee. Where thou needest help, He will give His, so that thy difficult task shall be easily mastered. And when thou art too weary to walk; when no more strength remains in thee; when thou sinkest on the battlefield or the steep hill—He will uphold thee. Dost thou doubt? Behold at His right hand, Jesus sits, thy Lover and Saviour. It is a right hand of righteousness, that can never act unworthily of itself, or fail the trusting soul.

“The steps of faith  
Fall on the seeming void—and find  
The rock beneath!”



*A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench.*      *Isa. xlii. 3.*

THIS is characteristic of Jesus Christ. Our great enemy argues so differently. He says, See ! it is but a piece of smouldering tow ; blow it out, it is not worth conserving. Jesus says, it *is* only smouldering, but there is the more reason why I should blow it into a flame. Satan says, *that* is only a bruised reed, trample it beneath thy feet ; Jesus says, because it *is* so bruised, it needs very special tenderness, care, and skill, to make anything of it : let Me have it. Satan says, *that* is only a charred brand plucked out of the fire, cast it back again, it will never be of any use ; Jesus answers, it cost Me too much to pluck it out, and I am not going to cast it back again ; besides, if there is only a little left of solid wood, it needs the more solicitude to preserve it, and use what there is.

Weakness, weariness, and sin, never fail to draw forth the deepest sympathy from the Lord Jesus. Nothing lays a stronger hold upon Him, or brings Him more swiftly to our side. At home our mother was always sweet, but sweetest when we were ill or weary. It almost tempted us to sham, so as to be more coaxed. And Christ's love is like mother's. You need not sham with Him, you are weak and broken enough. But those who are most bruised and struggling get the tenderest manifestations of His love. He resembles the strong man, with muscles like iron, and who stands like a rock, but who will bend in tears and tenderness over His cripple-child.

“ It shall be

A Face like my face that receives thee, a Man like to me,  
Thou shalt love and be loved by forever ; a Hand like  
this hand

Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee ! See  
the Christ stand ! ”



*Now thus saith the Lord.*

*Isa. xliii. 1, 2.*

*WHO is He that saith ?*—He that *created* thee in the womb of time ; that has moulded and *formed* thee in all the varying providences of life ; that *redeemed* thee by His most precious blood ; that knows and *calls* thee by thy name. When Prince Albert died, the Queen cried, in the agony of her grief, “ There will be no one now to call me Victoria.” Ah, but there is always One who will call His own by name. Simon, Simon !

*What doth He prognosticate ?*—He foretells that there will be fire through which the ore of character must be passed, and waters which the pilgrim host must traverse. This is inevitable. He is too transparently truthful to engage us without telling the nature of His service. Through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom.

“ The path of sorrow, and that path alone,  
Leads to the world where sorrow is unknown.”

*What doth He promise ?*—In all our lot, God is willing to be our partner and companion. He has called us into fellowship with His Son, and in His faithfulness He will see us through. The waters rise, the night is dark, the ford is hard to find, and footing is insecure ; but He is at hand, steadying the feet, and keeping the head above the floods. The fiery furnace is heated sevenfold, so that the strongest soldiers in the armies of the world are consumed by its flame ; but one like the Son of Man walks by his faithful witnesses, and makes the burning embers more delightful than the dewy sward of Paradise. The bonds will be burned, and the captive limbs set free ; but no hair of the head shall perish, nor the smell of fire pass on thee.

*O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of Me.*

*Isa. xliv. 21.*

WE think He has forgotten. We lie on our bed of pain, and He sends no chariot to fetch us home. We linger to extreme old age, and are lonely because all the companions of our youth have left our side, and it seems as though He had forgotten to send the ferry-boat across for His child. And the river-brink is cold. We toil all through the night against wind and wave, and it seems inexplicable that the Master tarries so long on the shore. We sit by our dead ; and though we sent for Him four days ago, He has not come. We told Him that we had come to our last crust ; but as yet no raven has brought us food.

When I was a very little boy, one stormy night, my father, who usually fetched me when the weather was bad, forgot to call for me, and it grew later and later ; all the other boys had been sent to bed, and I heard them proposing to send me, and I had never slept outside my father's house. I kept up as long as I could, and then my heart broke. It was only a momentary forgetting, however ; for he came for me at last, through miles of storm—and love made amends. But not for a moment can God forget. He is never nearer than when He seems further. He has redeemed. His blood awaits its holy ministry of blotting out sin. He has tied up His heart with us. We are graven upon the palms of His hands.

The dying thief asked to be remembered. And Jesus said in effect : " Remember thee ! How could I ever forget thee, who alone couldst speak sustaining words of love and trust in these sad hours ? Remember thee ! Dost thou ask only to be remembered ? I tell thee, when the shadows fall around the holy city, and all these crowds have gone to their homes, thou shalt be with Me in Paradise."

*Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker.*

*Isa. xlv. 9.*

*GOD moulds us* as a potter does his clay. In doing this, He comes to a point where our nature seems entrenched in all its might. We can yield everything but this. But not to yield this is to neutralize our yielding in all beside. That is where the soul strives with God. It is the battlefield, the crisis, the crease-line of destiny.

*We may strive with God* in two ways, saying, What makest Thou? or, He hath no hands; either by accusing Him of not having a definite purpose, or by alleging that He is not taking the best method of accomplishing it. Have you ever questioned the love, or wisdom, or purpose of God, in the moulding and education of your soul? Or have you questioned the benevolence and wisdom of His methods? To do either of these is disastrous to peace of heart and growth in grace. We must will and dare to believe that God is doing His very best for us, and doing it in the very best way.

*The fate of those who strive against their Maker is very terrible.*

They are counted as potsherds. "Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth." What is a potsherd? A shred of pottery, which may have been part of a beautiful vase, but now as a broken fragment is good for nothing but the rubbish-heap. See it protruding from the cinders! This is the fate of the castaway, which the apostle feared. The image says nothing as to our eternal destiny, but assures us that we may miss all opportunity of serving the purposes of God. Agree, therefore, with thy Divine Adversary quickly, lest He cast thee aside, or touch thee in the sinew of the thigh that shrinks, and thou limp through the remainder of thy days.

*I have made, and I will bear.*

*Isa. xlv. 4.*

WE must not press these words unduly, because we have doubtless warped our original constitution by habits of sin and selfishness, for which we are largely responsible. In these we may look to God for deliverance, but we cannot hold Him responsible.

But there are other attitudes of character and circumstances of life which are the direct result of God's appointment. He allowed us to be born with such a temperament, of such parents, and in such a home. He knew exactly what was to be the climate and color of the land of our birth. He permitted us to begin our life-race with certain infirmities and disabilities, which have been apparently a great hindrance to our success. He has allowed us to enter a business, or become united in the marriage tie, which seems entirely hostile to our best interests. But all this should only cast us the more upon Him. "He *will* bear," as He *hath* borne, our griefs and our sorrows. It is when we touch the lowest depth of our trouble that we most clearly hear Him say, Child, My grace is sufficient for thee; thy weakness is that which the more calls forth My strength; I will turn it for My glory through thy life.

By His grace He bears and upholds us in the circumstances in which He has placed us; and more than this, He bears in patience and love what our willfulness puts upon Him. He bare our sins in His own body on the tree; and now He bears with our murmurings, petulance, and rebellion.

O God, Thou hast made us, and not we ourselves; we are Thy people and the sheep of Thy pasture; still bear with our wanderings and sins, we entreat Thee, till Thou hast made us what we would be, and made us meet for Thy use.

*Come down, and sit in the dust.*

*Isa. xlvii. 1.*

All through the history of the chosen people there has been a great antagonist. In the days of the sons of Noah, Babel; in the days of the kingdom, Babylon; in opposition to the Church, Babylon the Great. And deeper than any earthly embodiment, always the spirit of the world, which exalteth itself, and setteth itself against God. Babylon was used by God to execute His purposes on Israel; but she altogether mistook the situation, and attributed her success to her prowess and the might of her arms. She acted with the utmost mercilessness and pride toward the nations of her time; and, therefore, when she had so far fulfilled the Divine purpose, her own judgment drew near.

Look at home! To colonize; to civilize heathen races; to make roadways across the ocean, along which the Gospel may travel; to link the whole world by the nerves of telegraph-wires; to give the Bible to every people under heaven—such has been the mission of the Anglo-Saxon race. But how much evil has mingled with it all! Think of the opium traffic, the sale of fire-water, the land-grabbing! Remember the impurity, the drunkenness, the godlessness, which have followed in the track of army and navy! Consider also the way in which our peoples are giving themselves up to pleasure-seeking and luxury, to Sabbath-breaking and irreligion, to spiritualism and so-called Christian science! And then ask whether there is not grave cause for apprehension. That Babylon should fall seemed utterly unlikely to the men of Isaiah's time; as unlikely as the fall of the Anglo-Saxon race. But it befell; and she who had sat delicately on the throne, was bidden to do the menial work of a slave.

*For Mine own sake, for Mine own sake, will I do it.*

*Isa. xlviii. 11.*

GOD finds His supreme motive in Himself. Mark how strongly He insists on it. "For My name's sake will I defer Mine anger; and for My praise will I refrain from thee." And in this verse He twice repeats, "for Mine own sake." Surely this is a matter for extreme comfort and congratulation.

If God had saved us because of some trait of natural beauty and attractiveness which He beheld in us, He might turn from us when it faded before the touch of years, or the change of our inward temper. The woman whose only claim on attention and homage is in her face—who has no other qualities to command and retain respect, must often dread the inevitable effect of time. It would be therefore a cause of perpetual unrest to us if God's motive were only one of pity or complacency.

But God's motive is His character, His name and nature, the maintenance of His honor in the face of the universe. In the face of the universe of intelligent beings He is too deeply implicated in our salvation to show signs of variableness or the shadow of turning. He did not begin to save us because we were worthy or lovely, but because He would; and therefore He will not give up because we prove ourselves weak and worthless and difficult to save. There are times with us all when we can but cast ourselves on His infinite grace and say, "Save me for Thine own name's sake." And when we have been overcome by sin, it is good to go to Him and say, "Father, I have nothing to plead but Thy own nature and name declared in Jesus: for His sake, because Thou hast made a promise to Him, and to me in Him; for Thy glory's sake defer Thine anger, forgive my sins; save me for Thine own name's sake."



*In the shadow of His hand hath He hid me.*

*Isa. xlix. 2.*

THESE words were addressed to Israel, and must be applied to Him who alone has expressed the true genius and spirit of the Hebrew people, that Prince of the House of David whom we call Master and Lord. And in so far as we belong to and resemble Him, we may claim that God should make these words true of us.

*The mouth, like the sharp sword*, recalls the portrait of the Son of Man, out of whose mouth a sharp two-edged sword proceeded. We may well ask that our words should partake of the nature of the Word of God, which is quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword (Rev. i. 16).

*Hidden in the shadow of God's hand* is a safe and strong position for the Christian worker. We all need more of the shadow, and we need not fear it when it is cast by His hand. Our life must be hidden with Christ in God, if we shall come forth largely to influence men. Do not be afraid of the shadow, Christian worker.

*The polished shaft* is one which is free from rust. Nothing removes rust like friction, whether by the file or sand-paper. We have often to submit to the chafe of tiny irritants in order to keep us polished.

*In His quiver hath He hid me.*—Always ready for use, within reach of God's hand, waiting to be adjusted to the bowstring, and launched through the air to some joint in the harness; such should be our attitude. But again it is impressed upon us that we must be hidden through long periods of cessation from active use, content with the darkness of the quiver until the moment of our mission has arrived. Then forward, with the might of God's hand thrilling through our souls.

*The Lord God hath given me the tongue of them that are taught.*

*Isa. l. 4 (R. V.).*

THIS is a beautiful image. Morning by morning the Lord God draws near His chosen servant and awakens him, calling him by name, giving him some sweet message, and preparing him for the day's errands, duties, and sufferings.

*The tongue of the learner.*—The sense of the original is somewhat obscured by the use of the word "learned." It should be "disciple": one that learns through being taught. We must be disciples before we can be apostles, and be taught before we teach. We shall never do our best work for God until we accustom ourselves to receive and take His messages; and there is no such time as the early morning for the lowly posture of sitting at the Master's feet to hear His word.

*To him that is weary.*—Notice that God's messengers are sent to the weary. There are so many of these in the world that special provision must be made for their sustaining and comfort. God needs a great company of Barnabas's sons of consolation, who having been comforted shall know how to comfort others. No kind of ministry needs such careful preparation as that exercised toward the weary and heavy-laden. To learn how to do this involves some months of lonely suffering.

*Wakened to hear.*—In softest whispers God draws nigh, uncovering the ear, putting back the locks that might intercept His gentlest accent. Only let us see to it that we are not rebellious, or turn away back. Let not the lowliness of the work, the weary mind, the worry about tiny questions, put us off from this sacred enterprise. And let us not be dissuaded by those who would smite, and pluck out the hair. Neither pride nor fear may deter from this sacred work.



*I, even I, am He that comforteth you.*

*Isa. li. 12.*

IT is related that in the great Indian Mutiny, when some hundreds of English ladies with their children were shut up in the Residency at Lucknow, and threatened by an immense crowd of rebels, a leaf of the Bible, stained with blood, and used as a common piece of wrapping, was brought in to them, and proved to contain these words. It reminded them of God their Maker ; and bade them fear no more the fury of the oppressor, or the failure of bread, because the Lord God was at hand to neutralize the tumult and fury of their foes.

In the Lord our Maker we have the only antidote for alarm and sorrow. At this time the cross had not been erected with its precious revelation of the love of God ; and the prophet quotes two of the greatest proofs of God's might—the miracle of Creation, with its over-arching heavens and deep-laid foundations of the earth ; and that of the deliverance from Egypt.

Go out into nature, behold the might of God written on His glorious works, and then say to yourself, This God is my Father ; and He would rather sacrifice worlds of matter, than forget or forsake His child. It were easier for Him to destroy all that He has made, and re-create it in a moment of time, than allow one of His weakest children that trusts in Him to be overwhelmed by trouble. Then go forth and stand at the cross, and remember that it was for thee. Surely He who went to so great expenditure to purchase thee from the power of hell, will not let thee perish before the malice of man. Furious men are but the foam of the breaker which your Deliverer will put aside. The sea may roar, but it cannot overwhelm.

*Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord.*

*Isa. lii. 11.*

THE chosen people are at the end of the seventy years' captivity ; the time of their deliverance from Babylon has arrived. Their Almighty Deliverer, throwing back the loose sleeve of His robe, to leave His arm free, makes ready for an unusual exercise of power. There will be no need of haste as when the people fled at night from Egypt. They may not go out with haste, nor go by flight ; for their Divine Leader would precede them, and His escort would be their rearguard.

This is the summons to us all who may have been in captivity to Babylon in any form. We are to arise and depart, shaking loose the bonds of our captivity. Let us follow the cloudy pillar of God's presence guiding us continually, and let us not be always looking behind, as though dreading the recurrence of past sins and mistakes. They shall not pursue those whom God has delivered ; or, if they do, they shall not overtake. It is an unspeakable comfort to those who have sinned to know that the old temptations and forms of bondage are intercepted by the presence of the Eternal God, just as His cloud intercepted Pharaoh's host.

The one matter about which we must be scrupulously careful is our cleanliness. Of old, Cyrus entrusted Ezra with the holy vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple. Their custodians needed to be holy. We, too, have to bear the sacred trust of God's holy Name and Gospel. His day, His Book, the doctrines of evangelical truth, His honor, are among the vessels which we are to carry through the world. We, too, must be holy, cleansing ourselves of all filthiness of the flesh and spirit ; coming out, and not touching the unclean thing.

*The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

*Isa. liii. 6.*

THE Lord did it, because He was the Lord, and He took on Himself the iniquity of us all. "Made to meet" is the marginal reading; as though many confluent streams poured their black substances into one foaming maelstrom which filled the heart of the dying Saviour. Well may the apostle Peter recapitulate his work in the matchless, almost monosyllabic sentence, "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree."

This verse begins and ends with *all*. We are all alike in having "gone astray." We have not all gone in the same direction, nor all to the same extent. We are not equally far from the fold. But we are all away from it. They say that if sheep can stray, they will; and there is no kind of animal more hopeless and helpless than sheep which have got out of the pen. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass its master's crib; the dog and cat will make their way home, but the sheep wanders on in small and ever smaller companies, until it is entrapped in the rocks, or devoured by wolves, or harried to death by dogs. Such were we. Panting, driven, chased, weary; but Jesus sought us, and brought us back to the fold, and gave us a name and place among His own. We are returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.

But ah, how can we forget the cost we have been to the Shepherd! See ye not the wounds in His hands and feet? Know ye not that His heart was lacerated and broken by the burden of our sins? "Our own way," that has been the curse of our lives, and the agony of our Shepherd. Would that it might be forever blocked against us, and that we might be led in His own way for His Name's sake!

*O Thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted.*

*Isa. liv. 11.*

FROM His standpoint of vision on the hill-tops of glory, He sees the tossings of thy craft. Every billow, every lurch, every rebuff, is discerned and felt by Him. He, too, has sailed through stormy seas, and is acquainted with grief. Not comforted by man, thou shalt be consoled by the Divine Comforter. Cast out by thy lovers, thou shalt be gathered to the bosom of God. When the man born blind was cast out of the synagogue, Jesus found him; and He will find thee.

Deep down in the tossing waves, He will lay thy foundations in fair colors, and will spare no stones, however precious, in the elaboration of thy character. Sapphires, rubies, and carbuncles are very resplendent and beautiful, but they are all the children of fire. You cannot have them unless prepared to pay the cost in blood and tears. These jewels are produced of very ordinary ingredients, which have been subjected to tremendous pressure and terrific heat. When next your heart misgives you amid your fiery trials, remember that God is at work making the rubies and carbuncles of your eternal array. You will be well compensated.

There are destructive agencies around us on all hands—the smith with his coals; the waster with his scythe; the destroyer with his weapon—but they are all beneath the mighty hand of God. They cannot overstep the limits He assigns. When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. He restrains the wrath of his foes, and surrounds him with a munition of rocks.

The blessings of this chapter are not for the Jews only, but for all the servants of the Lord. It is expressly stated that this is their heritage (ver. 17).

*Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree ;  
and instead of the briar the myrtle. Isa. lv. 13.*

HERE are the substitutions of grace. It would have been much to root up the thorn, and to cut up the briar, so that the soil should be rid of weeds ; but God does more. He substitutes fir-trees for thorns, and myrtles for briars ; and He does this for His Name's sake, and as a sign forevermore.

*He will do this in your character.*—There are thorns and briars there ; you must confess it to your cost. Now, do not be satisfied with their extermination, but seek that God should substitute their opposites ; so that the site of some old evil may be commemorated by the growth of some fair grace. Where the thorn of cynicism and sarcasm grew, there the graceful and sprightly fir of forbearance ; where the briar of malice and envy, there the sensitive delicate myrtle of charity. This is the triumph of grace in the believer's heart.

*He will do this in your home.*—You have a thorn in that husband, or a briar in that child. Once you used to look for relief in death. You almost questioned whether you might not hasten yourself out of such terrible and perpetual suffering. It seemed as though you were being scourged with thorns. But God will do much better than this. He is able to transform those trying dispositions. That husband will become your evergreen fir-tree : that child your myrtle.

*He will do this in your trials.*—There are briars besetting every path that call for earnest care. Many beside Paul have thorns in the flesh. But His grace is sufficient to change our biggest curse into our greatest blessing. Look for this. Ask God to transform the conditions of your life which have cost you excruciating anguish, into sources of benediction.

*Even them will I bring to My holy mountain.*

*Isa. lvi. 7.*

WHO are these favored souls? Ah, it is a miracle of grace and comfort to find that they were once, like ourselves, Gentiles after the flesh, separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise, dug from the same hole of the pit to which we have belonged! And if they were lifted to such holy nearness to God—if this be indeed a true picture of God's dealings with Gentiles, then let us take heart, and ask that not one of these good things should fail in our own experience.

But mark the conditions, as detailed in verse 6. We must be joined to the Lord in an indissoluble covenant; we must minister to Him in daily holy service as His priests; we must love His Name; we must diligently serve Him; we must abide in the Sabbath-keeping of the inner rest of the heart; and we must hold fast by His covenant. These are indispensable conditions to test the calibre and quality of the souls who are admitted to His inner presence. You must conform to them if you would be among those whom God brings in.

To what does God call such souls? To mountains of vision, whence they look out on eternal landscapes, and stand above the taint of this world, its smoke and dust. To joy: He makes them joyful in His house of prayer, for all true prayer has in it the seeds of everlasting joy. To that acceptance which fills the soul with calm and hallowed delight. Such things are within our reach; not too great or high for our feet to attain, because God will bring us in. He gathereth the outcasts; He collects His flock when straying, and leads them up to the dewy pastures of the mountain lawns.

*I create the fruit of the lips.*

*Isa. lvii. 19.*

OUR words should be like fruit. Fruit is the final cause and reason of a tree's culture ; and is it not to bear fruit that we have been redeemed and cultivated with infinite solicitude ? Fruit reveals the nature of its parent tree ; and is there anything that more quickly shows what we are than our talk ? " By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Fruit, when it is ripe, is sweet to the taste ; but beneath these luscious qualities there is always the ultimate design of securing the propagation of the tree through its seed ; so beneath the wit, or laughter, or strong common-sense of our words, there should be the aim of sowing in others the germs of eternal life.

How often, when we get into conversation with comparative strangers or our friends, we are at a loss to turn it into the right channels. Then, let us lift our thoughts to God, and say, Create in me now the right word, which shall refresh and help those whom I address. The answer will always be one of peace. " Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near." Let our lips ever ring with the silver notes of PEACE, *Peace ; PEACE, Peace.*

Still more in prayer we may claim that God should create the petitions which our lips offer. You feel that you cannot pray as you would. Now, put away the straining and striving which have robbed your quiet times of their blessedness. Kneel before God in the utter stillness of your spirit, and ask Him to create supplications, intercessions, and worship, on your lips. Dare to believe that He is doing this, and be assured that the most broken utterances, which He has created and given, are sweeter to Him than the most ornate ritual.



*The Lord shall guide thee continually ; and thou shalt be like a watered garden. Isa. lviii. 11.*

THESE are only a handful of the cluster of promises with which this chapter abounds. Let us ponder them ; they are full of comfort. To be guided continually ; to be satisfied when all the world around is athirst ; to be fair and attractive to those who see us from day to day ; to be as fountains of comfort and joy to the dry and weary land in which we are called to live—are not such blessings good to seek and keep ? But there are certain conditions that must be fulfilled. Before we break the seal and appropriate the money within, we must be sure that our name is on the envelope, and that we are intended by the designation.

*First*, we must undo. If we have injured others by word or act, or if we are still doing so, we must retrace our steps, and so far as possible undo the wrong (ver. 6).

*Next*, we must remember the Lord's words in Matt. xxv., and be willing to minister deeds of helpful sympathy to the bodies and souls of men, as though we were doing them to Him (ver. 7).

*Lastly*, we must ever remember to maintain within our hearts the spirit of Sabbatic calm and peace. Not fussy, nor anxious, nor fretful and impetuous ; but refraining our foot from our own paths and our hand from our own devices ; refusing to find our own pleasure, and do our own works. It is only when we are fully resolved to act thus, allowing God to originate all our plans, and to work in us for their accomplishment, that we enter on our heritage of blessedness, or are brought into the enjoyment of the continual guidance and blessing of which we have spoken. *Then* God will delight in us, and we in Him.



*My Spirit . . . and my words . . . shall not depart.*

*Isa. lix. 21.*

THIS is a very precious promise, especially to God's ministers and to all who are using their voice and lips in His holy service. These may claim its fulfillment up to the hilt ; and it is no doubt due to some pious ancestor having claimed these words that there is so often a godly succession of ministers in one family bearing the same honored name.

But these words are often quoted promiscuously and carelessly. Notice there are two traits of character distinctly noted and specified.

We must receive the Holy Spirit, and we must utter the words which He puts into our lips. They are one, because when the Holy Spirit fills the soul the lips are touched as with a live coal from off the altar. "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak." Oh, bend your head low beneath the anointing of the great High Priest. Let Him breathe on you, and say, Receive the Holy Spirit ; and then go out to be a witness for Him. Thou shalt be taught in the same hour what and how.

It is a marvellous thing that God should enter into covenant with man to keep on blessing His seed for His Word's sake. Yet He does so. He keeps His blessings for thousands of them that love Him and keep His commandments, whilst He punishes only to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him. Long after you have gone, if only you have earnestly done God's work in the world, He will be gracious to your children and your children's children. Not only, as the poet said, "in a dead man's face" comes out the likeness to one of his ancestors, but in the faces and lives of living men we may trace the influence of their godly forefathers.

*Arise, shine ; for thy light is come.*

*Isa. lx. 1.*

FOR long the night had brooded on Mount Zion, and the beautiful city had sat in the dust desolate and afflicted ; but at last the watchers see the sky brightening into the splendor of dawn, and the cry goes forth that the day is at hand, calling her to arise and shine.

Whenever the glory of the Lord rises upon thee, be sure to reflect it. Arise, shine ! Arise, to catch as much of it as possible. Shine, that others may catch as much as possible also. Behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord, in long and loving fellowship, till you reflect it in full-orbed glory ; and as you reflect it you will be changed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Lord the Spirit. Arise to the highest pinnacle of the mountain to catch the dawn, and then begin to shine with a glory that never shone on sea or shore.

Sometimes Christians seek release from their positions in business or social life, on the plea that they are so uncongenial and ungodly. Yet these are the very circumstances under which Zion is bidden to arise and shine. The darker the staircase, the more need of the candle. Because darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people, there is the more need for her towers to gleam with light. The Lord has given us the light of His countenance that we may flash it forward. In loneliness and solitude let us still shine for Jesus, like the stone-white steeple of a church, smitten by a search-light in the night.

“ Yet not in solitude ! if Christ anear me  
Waketh Him workers for the great employ !  
Oh, not in solitude !—if souls that hear me  
Catch from my joyance the surprise of joy.”

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me.*

*Isa. lxi. 1.*

WE can never disassociate those words from that memorable scene at the Jordan, when, after the Lord's baptism, the heavens were opened, and the Spirit, like a dove, rested upon Him. Forty days of fierce temptation could not deprive Him of that holy anointing; and He came to Galilee, stood up in the synagogue of Nazareth, and announced the anointing He had received.

If the Master needed it, how much more do we! If He did not attempt to bind up the broken-hearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, or the opening of the prison to the bound; if He would not preach, or comfort, or communicate joy, until that memorable unction had been imparted—how absurd it is for *us* to attempt similar works without this anointing!

What a marvellous forecast is here of the mission of Christ through His Church to the world during the present age. She is sent to take up and pass on this blessed ministry. What a true forecast also of the needs of mankind! It is as though the Holy Spirit desired to reveal the salient characteristics of the great sad world, that it would be full of the broken-hearted, of captives, prisoners, and mourners, needing Divine assistance and ministration. Man is so fallen and helpless that he needs the entire Trinity: *The Lord God*, the Father; *Me*, the Son; and *The Spirit*, the Holy Ghost.

When Jesus quoted these words He stopped at the comma in the second verse, which stood therefore for at least nineteen hundred years which intervene between the proclamation of the year of mercy and of the day of vengeance. The time for repentance is lengthening out, since God desires not the sinner's death, but that he should turn and live.

*For Jerusalem's sake I will not rest.*

*Isa. lxii. 1* (See also 6 and 7, R. V.).

WE have here the *unresting Christ*. Day and night He pleads for the city that crucified Him; and it is in answer to His supplications that she will one day arise from her ruins. Is it not also true that He ever lives to intercede for us, praying when we are silent, watching when we sleep? His prayer rises for His people night and day. Perhaps they would not pray for themselves, if His intercessions did not incite. Certainly His sifted Simons would drift beyond hope, if He did not pray for them. Every sinner has been prayed for to the end of time by Him who said, "Father, forgive"; and every saint, by Him who promised to pray the Father that He would give another Comforter, the Holy Ghost. The prayers of Jesus hover over the world like the dove over the weltering chaos of creation.

Next we have the *unresting watchmen* (ver. 6). Christ's intercession must be supplemented by ours—whether for the restoration of the Jews, or the upbuilding of the Church, or the salvation of individuals. There must be oneness of prayer between the Intercessor before the Throne, and His remembrancers on earth; and there will be, if the Holy Ghost is allowed to exercise His chosen ministry of making intercession with us on behalf of the saints according to the will of God.

Lastly, there is the *unresting God* (ver. 7). He, too, has no rest. The rest of God is crowded with thought and care for His own. The image of Buddha presents the conception of an impassive deity whose one aim is to rid himself of all that might trouble his repose. In our God, on the other hand, together with the perfect serenity and satisfaction of His nature, there are the eternal tides of desire and gracious help.

*The Spirit of the Lord caused them to rest.*

*Isa. lxiii. 14 (R. V.).*

IT is the noonday glare in Palestine. The sun's rays like spears of flame are striking down upon the parched sand-wastes, and all the land burns like a furnace. Away yonder is a sequestered glen, where mosses line the margins of streamlets and pools, and rich pasture keeps green in the shadow of the hills. Thither the cattle descend at noon. As the shadows creep down the mountain-sides they follow them, and presently the herd browses on the succulent herbage or reclines beneath the shadows of the spreading trees, while the brooks purl past clear and cool. Similarly Isaiah says God brought His people through the wilderness, leading them as a horse that might not stumble, and finally conducted them into the rest of Canaan.

But how fit an emblem is suggested of our Father's dealings with us. The scorching sun of temptation shines around us. The glare of publicity, the fever of money-making, the strife of tongues, torment the children of men. But for God's beloved ones there is a secret place by Him, a green and verdant nook, watered by the river of God. Over its portals these words are written: "I will give you rest."

When once we learn to trust our Father's un-failing love, we are *caused* to rest. Notice that forcible expression: the Spirit of the Lord *caused* them to rest. Here is a new thought of the omnipotence of love. It can so reveal itself that it almost compels rest. Cause us to lie down, O Lord, we pray Thee! Job speaks of Him as *giving* quietness: and then who can make trouble? Seek quietness as His gift! Lo! there is a place by Him, in the mountain-shadowed valley of His care, where disquieted souls are at peace. Seek it!

*Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness.*

*Isa. lxiv. 5.*

EVEN when visiting judgment upon the unrighteous, God remembers mercy for His people. He meets them as daily Helper and as eternal Saviour. But He always comes toward them down one pathway; and if we would encounter Him, we must tread it. It is the path of waiting expectancy (ver. 4); of rejoicing obedience; of holy remembrance. In these paths He meets us most graciously, working for us, and revealing things which from of old men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, nor seen.

This meeting of His servants has ever been one of the ways of God. It was His daily habit to meet Adam in the dewy glades of Paradise, and talk with him. As Melchizedek of old met Abraham after a great conflict, so Christ comes upon His people after many a hard duty and severe contest with evil, and ministers heavenly refreshment. As He met Mary at the sepulchre, and Peter in the garden, and the two that walked to Emmaus, and the disciples in the grey dawn by the lake, so He meets us still.

To be thus met by God is a glad Christian experience. At morning prayer it gives strength and joy for the entire day; at eventide it is an inestimable consolation and encouragement. Often Christ will encounter us when treading some lowly path of daily duty, and or ever we are aware, we shall be called up into His chariot. Those whom He meets He will accompany in the way; those whom He accompanies He will succor and sustain.

It is very consoling to be told that in these ways of our dear Lord there is continuance (ver. 5). He is not spasmodic nor changeable. On and on forevermore, without the shadow of turning He will meet and bless us.

*Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth.*

*Isa. lxx. 17.*

THE heavens and earth that are now were not produced in their present shape in a day; but through long periods, which are chronicled in the strata of the earth, God was at work building them up. So beneath the scaffolding of history and human affairs it may be that the Creator is already at work laying the foundations of the new era which shall soon be unveiled. But the creation of the new is much more difficult than of the old, because there is so much undoing to be done. Amid the crash of empire, the rock of revolutions, the blood, and tears, and anguish of the present, God is making room for and preparing the new heavens and earth in which dwelleth righteousness.

Just think of these exquisite words!—"Never remembered, nor come to mind!" Our bitter sorrows transmuted into such exquisite blessedness that for very joy of heart we shall have no room for remembering what seemed once intolerable. We shall not recall the nights of pain, the years of enforced inactivity, the failures, the partings, the bereavements. The betrothed will forget the long years of waiting. We turn to the Book of Revelation for further particulars, and there learn that the blessed future can only be explained in negatives. What heaven will really be is as yet hidden, that the surprise may be the greater; but it is certain that each of the elements of present distress will be eliminated. No more sorrow, pain, death, curse, tears, or separating sea. Christ will make, is making, all things new; and, best of all, He is making us new to enjoy them.

Oh, blessed condition, in which God will not remember our sins, and we shall not remember the former things, of pain, and sorrow, and death!



*As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.*

*Isa. lxvi. 13.*

THERE is the mother nature as well as that of the father in God. We are familiar with the thought of the Divine Fatherhood; let us not forget the Divine Motherhood. All the soft, gentle touches of mother's hand, unlike any other hands; all the tender pleading, yearning affection; all the utter selflessness, that never reckes what it expends for the objects of its solicitude, are equally in God. But as men get mad with drink and sin, and refuse the sweet mother-love which would gather them, until worn-out and weary they come back to it wrecked and forlorn, so we have drifted from God's mother-heart, getting to ourselves pain and loss, and missing its exquisite solace. Fools that we are!

Come back to it, children! Like wayward runaway babes, at the end of the long summer's day, who, shamefaced and sorrowful, with their torn clothes and grimy faces, hardly dare present themselves to those tender eyes, and yet have no alternative, and know that they may count on the most tender reception. So come back to Him. He will receive, forgive, cleanse, comfort.

A mother's comfort! Estimate it at its full. Remember how your mother comforted you, as a little child; as a man at the death of your young wife; as a maiden when love had disappointed. How much more God! May we not then address to God's tender heart those most exquisite words:

“Neither love me for  
Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry,  
Since one might well forget to weep who bore  
Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby;  
But love me for love's sake, that evermore  
Thou mayst love on through love's eternity.”

*Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.*  
*Jer. i. 6.*

A SENSE of helplessness is of prime importance as a preparation for ministry. Those who count themselves able to speak will never become God's mouthpiece; while those who have no words of their own will be surprised to find how forcible and perennial the stream of holy speech will become through their lips. Though you cannot, He can; and your sense of inability is the condition that the Spirit of your Father should speak through you. Learn to appropriate the Saviour's affirmation, "The words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself, but the Father that dwelleth in Me doeth the works."

How many of the greatest men have been broken under a sense of their insufficiency! That passage in the life of John Livingstone comes back to me as I write. He had spoken at the yearly communion at Kirk o' Shotts on the Sabbath with marvellous power, and had been requested to preach on the following morning, which he promised to do on condition that his friends should spend the night in prayer. But as he awoke in the morning he was so overwhelmed with the sense of his incompetence that he went three and a-half miles out of the town, to be brought back, however, and to preach so marvellously that five hundred souls were converted.

The writer can never forget the comfort that this passage gave him in early boyhood, when he anxiously feared that he never would be able to exercise the ministry of the Gospel. One morning, years ago, when in great anxiety to learn whether his was a true vocation to the Christian ministry, the Bible opened to this page, and he can bear witness that God has been faithful.

*Broken cisterns that can hold no water.*

*Jer. ii. 13.*

IN yonder fruitful valley a fountain rises, full of living, sparkling, delicious water. But, see, all the able-bodied inhabitants have left their houses, climbing to the rugged rocks above their homes, and are engaged with incredible labor in hewing them out those rocky cisterns which travellers tell us abound in Eastern lands. The heights resound with the ringing notes of hammer and chisel; for months they labor at their assiduous toils; but when all is done, the cisterns are discovered to be broken by flaws, and to provide but brackish water at the best.

Such is the picture painted from life by Jeremiah; but how truly it represents the spirit of the world! Leaving God, in whom alone man's thirsty spirit can find satisfaction and thirst-quenching, he hath set himself, with infinite labor, to hew out cisterns of gold and silver, cisterns of splendid houses and reputable characters, and lavish alms deeds, cisterns of wisdom and ancient lore. From any of these the hewer thinks he will obtain sufficient supplies to last him for his life. At the best, however, the water is brackish, wanting the sparkle of oxygenated life; hot with the heat of the day.

Jehovah may well ask whether such a spectacle can be matched anywhere else in the world. Heathen peoples are notoriously true to their ancestral faiths and practices. For vast eras the worship of ancestors has been maintained in China, and of fire by the followers of Zoroaster. There is no change in the votive offerings which the poor Hindoos of all ages have laid before their impassive deities. "Hath a nation changed their gods, which yet are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit."

*They shall say no more, The ark of the covenant  
of the Lord.* *Jer. iii. 16.*

THERE was a time in Israel when the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord was the symbol of the national hopes and deliverances. If Israel was smitten before her enemies, it was thither that the people turned for help. On one memorable occasion, they brought from Shiloh the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubim—and when it came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again; and even the Philistines were afraid. But Jeremiah says that this would never be done in the coming time. Why? Partly because the people would rely more on the spiritual presence than the material emblem, and partly because a new covenant would have been inaugurated, superseding the old.

In all true lives there is something of this. We outgrow our old experiences, and get as far beyond them as they were once beyond anything we had attained. It seems to you that you cannot look for higher heights, more heavenly experiences, or deeper insight than you have had. Beware lest you limit God. Your highest watermark shall be overleaped when the tide comes in again. Wordsworth says Nature was ever singing to the child a more exquisite song, and telling a more wonderful tale. And is not Nature's voice the voice of God? Are not the inexhaustible stores of Nature but an emblem of the still more inexhaustible stores of Grace? Dare to press on to the things that are before. There is more love than has ever ravished your heart; more joy than has ever shed its ecstasy through your emotions; more utter consecration, closer union; more rapturous insight into the oneness of the Holy Trinity, and our inclusion in its mystic circle.

*Break up your fallow ground, and sow not  
among thorns.* *Jer. iv. 3.*

GOD'S sowing times are often neutralized by the hardness of the soil of our hearts. Caked over by the heavy tread of the passing years, neglected opportunities, and worldly society, even by the beautiful feet of His messengers, they need to be broken up. We sometimes speak of the breaking *down* of a great convention; but such an experience ought to lead to a breaking *up* of fallow ground. If this does not accrue from the gracious working of the Holy Spirit, it must be effected by the ploughshare of pain. "Tribulation" is derived from the Latin word for a harrow, *tribulum*.

In Finney's Revival Sermons there is a great discourse on this text at the beginning of the book. It was the evangelist's wont to open a mission by enumerating the ways by which his hearers' hearts could be laid open to receive the seed of the kingdom. When hearing the Gospel, it is specially necessary to guard our hearers and ourselves against all hardness of heart and contempt of God's Word and commandment.

Our Lord clearly tells us what the thorns are. He says they are the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life (Luke viii. 14). The cares of the poor are as inimical to true religion as the wealth of the rich; and the absorption of the heart in pleasure is as hurtful as either. There is no room on the soil of our nature for more than one absorbing passion. If that be for the glory of Christ, it includes all other desires and pursuits; but if our thoughts are diverted to things or persons apart from Him, there is but little energy left for a strong religious life. O God, fill our hearts with such good crops that there may be no room for thorns!

*The sand for the bound of the sea, which it cannot pass.*  
*Jer. v. 22 (R. V., marg.).*

WHAT an insignificant atom is a grain of sand ! But God has chosen to arrest the advance of the mighty billows by a barrier of sand-grains. Let the ocean chafe as it will, it cannot pass its defined limits. It may destroy the solid masonry of human construction, but it is foiled by a bank of soft sand.

“What cannot His power accomplish for me,  
Who makes of soft sand a strong bar to the sea !”

There are many illustrations of this in the history of the Church. The pride of the persecutor has been arrested by the prayers and tears of men, women, and children, who have had no more strength in themselves than a bank of sand-grains, but have succeeded in arresting the might of their foes. The persecutions of the Roman Empire were finally renounced because they actually promoted the cause they were intended to destroy. By the weak things of this world God brings to naught the things that are reckoned mighty.

What a picture of weak submission, of suffering patience, of unresisting gentleness is the sand ! What a type of God's hidden ones, whom the world knows not ! Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings He ordains strength : out of weakness He makes strong : out of the passive sufferers He makes His strongest ramparts.

“The race of God's anointed priests shall never pass  
away ;  
Before His glorious face they stand, and serve Him  
night and day.  
Though reason raves, and unbelief flows on a mighty  
flood,  
There are, and shall be, till the end, the hidden priests  
of God.”

*Saying, Peace, peace ; when there is no peace.*

*Jer. vi. 14 (R. V.).*

WE spare ourselves, and we are willing to be spared by others. The knife must not cut to the quick; the wound must not be probed to the bottom. We are glad to attend a ministry which is not too searching, dealing with the soul rather than with the spirit; with the intellect rather than with the heart. We are quite prepared that the root and core of our trouble should not be dealt with, if only we may be made presentable to our fellow creatures as soon as possible. The corrupt matter may still be in the wound, certain to break out again; but we are not desirous that it should be driven forth, if only we may soon regain our comeliness.

In our dealings with God let us reverse all this, and ask that He will not spare us, or give us anything less than the best. The process may be painful and protracted, but it will be sure. The pressing of the putrid matter from the wound may distress and horrify; but it will make sure work in the end.

“Alas,” says Tersteegen, “some never arrive at a thorough knowledge of their inward corruption and their hidden self-love, nor of the perfect, holy, secluded, hidden life in Christ, which is the life of the new creature. Nor do they know the power of the Spirit of Christ, working in His own members, and bringing forth in them the outward life of holiness to God. For all these things are taught to the soul by God, and would never have entered into the thoughts of men; and they have limited themselves within themselves, and enclosed themselves, so to speak, within their own ideal.” Let us be warned by these words, and never heal up any wound which God would keep open, till all the evil it was intended to remove has left our system.



*The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord,  
the temple of the Lord, are these. Jer. vii. 4.*

WHEN Jeremiah threatened Israel with the coming of the king of Assyria, the false prophets minimized the terror of his utterances by pointing to the temple and assuring the people that there was no reason to anticipate the overthrow of their city, since it was the custodian of the holy shrine of Jehovah. "Ye have the temple in your midst, surely then you are a religious people. You cannot be as bad as this pessimistic prophet alleges, and God cannot very well dispense with you."

But men may perform the most sacred rites, and yet perpetrate the grossest crimes. The presence of a temple with all its priests and rites does not necessarily denote holiness; but often the contrary. In Roman Catholic countries, brigands will seek the blessing of heaven on their plans of murder and plunder. Our safety lies, not in outward rites, but in amending our ways and doings. Not in having sprung from godly parents, nor in engagedness in holy things, nor in the practice of religious rites, will help come; but in being genuinely right with God. Real religion consists not in temple-rites, but in humility, unselfishness, and godliness. Saul of Tarsus is the type of many who are zealous for religion, but destitute of its power.

"Here on earth a temple stands,  
Temple never built with hands;  
There the Lord doth fill the place  
With the glory of His grace.  
Cleansed by Christ's atoning Blood,  
Thou art this fair house of God,  
Where the soul, a priest in white,  
Singeth praises day and night;  
Glory of the Love divine,  
Filling all this heart of thine."

*Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?*  
*Jer. viii. 22.*

HOW many of God's children are discouraged! They have mourned, confessed, and resolved; but they do not expect to see any great alteration in themselves. They have lost hope. Now, it is evident that as long as this spirit prevails, there is very little prospect of improvement. Discouragement can only bring defeat. One of the first objects of a physician is always to awaken hope, for otherwise he knows that his medicines can profit but little. Now, bethink you, what is the cause of your failure? Is it in God? Is there not balm in Gilead? Is there not a physician there? Why, then, is the health of the daughter of my people recovered?

O wounded, sorrowful soul, there is balm in Gilead, there is a Good Physician. No hurt He cannot heal, no bleeding He cannot staunch, no sickness He cannot cure! Why keep lamenting so bitterly, "My bad heart, my bad heart"? Why speak as though that temper, that predisposition to sin, that habit, were to be lost only in death? Why be un comforted? Jesus can heal all sicknesses, all diseases, among the people. One touch of the King can heal the soul of whatsoever disease it has.

Why are you not in health? It is because you resort to quacks, and not to the Divine Physician; or because you do not bare your pain to its roots before Him; or because you refuse to abandon yourself wholly to His prescriptions and treatment. Dare to search out and know the cause of ill-health; for be sure it is on your side, not Christ's. Then let Him treat you as He will. He will prescribe diet, exercise, fresh air, change of scene. He may use the knife, but He will do His work as dexterously and painlessly as possible. "Who healeth *all* thy diseases."

*Who is he to whom the mouth of the Lord hath spoken, that he may declare it ?*      *Jer. ix. 12.*

A SAINTLY soul has translated these words into music, which expresses their inner thought :

“ Lord, speak to me, that I may speak  
In living echoes of Thy tone :  
As Thou hast sought, so let me seek  
Thy erring children, lost and lone.

“ O teach me, Lord, that I may teach  
The precious things Thou dost impart :  
And wing my words, that they may reach  
The hidden depths of many a heart.”

With such expressions of the disciples of the Lord, we should couple His sublime words : “ Be not anxious how or what ye shall speak : for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.” And again He said : “ What I tell you in the darkness, speak ye in the light : and what ye hear in the ear, proclaim upon the housetops.” Often we have run before we were sent. We have spoken our own message, and it has fallen flat and powerless. We have elaborated our sentences with careful art, but they have been lighter than vanity, for want of the King’s word, in which alone there is power.

Let us amend our ways, and wait on Him for His word, going forth to speak it with an authority which can only be obtained when one has the consciousness of a Thus saith the Lord. We may have to go into the darkness of pain and sorrow, or hide in the closet far from the rush of the world, and the clamor of human voices ; but we shall hear Him speak, as the prophet Elijah did at Horeb, when the still, small voice filled the cave with its thrilling cadence.

*The shepherds are become brutish, and have not inquired of the Lord.*                      *Jer. x. 21 (R. V.).*

THIS is a very solemn indictment; but the pity of it is that it is true of many shepherds of flocks in our own land. We must avoid generalizing too widely; but, on the whole, it is incontestable that a dwindling flock and waning cause point to prayerlessness perhaps on the part of the members, but almost certainly on the part of the shepherd himself. And it becomes us to search our hearts to see how far our prayerlessness may not be hindering the work of God in our own church.

One of the most solemn sermons ever addressed to ministers is that of Dr. Binney's on this text; and he shows that the correlative must also be true, and that where we seek the Lord we shall prosper, our work shall become successful, and our flock increased. The old Latin motto said that to pray is to labor; and some of the best work in the world has been done by simple prayer. You may be laboring quite as effectively when you are shut within your closet doors as when going to and fro in the world in active Christian endeavor. It is remarkable that whilst Philip was able to preach Jesus, and to bring many to Him, it was needful that the best results of the Gospel could not be realized till Peter and John had come down from Jerusalem to pray for the new converts (Acts viii. 14). Let us ponder and practice the five simple rules given by our sainted brother, George Müller, for prevailing prayer:—(1) Not for our own worthiness. (2) Solely through Christ's merits, on the ground of His cross and resurrection. (3) For the glory of God. (4) No sin must be allowed, since this absolutely bars blessing. (5) Be patient: glorify God by waiting on Him.

*Then answered I, and said, Amen, O Lord.*

*Jer. xi. 5.*

WHEN God recapitulated His promises in the heart of Jeremiah, even though they involved a curse on those who neutralized His words, there arose from it a deep response. He answered and said, Amen, O Lord. What a remarkable example for us all ! By life and lip, by deed and word, when we can understand and when we cannot, when the words are illuminated with blue and gold, when they are as black as the old black-lettered missals, always and everywhere, let us answer, and say, Amen, O Lord. We are irresistibly reminded of our Lord's words, after He had been contemplating the doom of the cities that refused Him, and the mysterious refusal which the wise and prudent accorded to His message. He said solemnly and emphatically, "Yea, Father."

It is an awful thing to read this context, and to remark the sentence to which Jeremiah said Amen. "Cursed be the man that heareth not the words of this covenant." Is it lawful, think you, to infer that the saints will one day acquiesce in God's verdict on the disobedient and ungodly ? It may be that we shall be so fully convinced of the mercy of God, which sought the salvation of the lost, and shall see so clearly all the many efforts He made for their arrest, that we shall solemnly and sadly answer and say, Amen, O Lord, to their doom.

But if these words should be read by one who is resisting and disbelieving the love of God that would fain lead him into the land that floweth with milk and honey, let him beware lest his sinful refusal to be saved, his strife against the mercy of God, will one day be so patent that his dearest friend will answer and say, Amen, O Lord.

*Righteous art Thou, O Lord: . . . wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Jer. xii. 1.*

“I WOULD reason with Thee.” Religion is often misrepresented as unreasonable. But there is nothing to warrant the charge. On the contrary, the perpetual note of the Scriptures is, “Come and let us reason together.” Doubtless there are many things revealed which never could have been discovered by reason, but there is nothing which may not be apprehended and appreciated by it. Man’s reason was made in the image of God’s. At present, however, our reasoning faculties are probably in their earliest stage of development, and we are much as infants admitted to some scientific laboratory or library.

God demands that we should use our reason, not only on the facts of nature, but on those revealed in the Bible. He likes us to reason out things with Him. Much better this than to reason against Him. If instead of turning from Him to discuss with each other, men would only turn to Him, there would be given them either an insight into His ways, or grace to wait and trust. Job, Moses, Asaph, and Jeremiah did this; and with them all the same problem troubled them, *Why do the wicked prosper?*

But there is one fact which can never be questioned. We must always begin our reasoning by saying, “Righteous art Thou, O God.” This is a foundation fact which underlies His throne. We cannot question it. By the very conscience which He has put within us, and by the whole trend and drift of His Providence, He has put His Righteousness beyond question. As Abraham said, the Judge of all the earth must do right. But when we grant this, we may proceed to ask how certain facts which are permitted in the world are consistent with it. He may explain: or He may say, Not now, but presently.

*That they might be unto Me for a people, and for a name, and for a glory.* Jer. xiii. 11.

ISRAEL had the opportunity of becoming a people, a name, and a glory; but they would not. In their declension and refusal God has turned to the Church, largely chosen from among the Gentiles, and in which we by His grace have a part. To us their privileges are offered. Let us gladly avail ourselves of them, and become unto God the people of His inheritance, in whom He may find a welcome and a home. Oh to be a name to Him, so that men may understand and revere Him the better because of what we are! Oh to be a glory to Him, so that He may account us as His choice ornament and jewel! Oh to be as intimately united to Him as the girdle worn on the prophet's loins!

Our hearts misgive us as we write or read. How can such things be? Behold, like that same girdle we have become marred and profitless. Yet, there is one phrase here which is radiant with hope: "As the girdle cleaveth . . . so have I *caused to cleave*." "Caused to cleave." We are not able to cleave; we have so often tried to, and failed; but now we come in humble eagerness before Him, and say, "Cause us to cleave, O God; cause us to walk in Thy ways; cause us to do Thy will; cause us to be a people, a name, and a glory unto Thyself."

"O man," Tersteegen said, "whoever you are, stand still for a moment, and think earnestly of the high dignity for which you were created and sent into the world by God. You were not made for time and for passing things, but for God and eternity, and to have your heart filled with God and with the things eternal. Yield yourself up fearlessly to His mighty working, and be still, and welcome Him in His gracious operation in the heart."



*Why shouldest Thou be as a man astonished, as a mighty man that cannot save ?*      *Jer. xiv. 9.*

A STRONG man may be rendered powerless by a reel of cotton being wound around him. Each thread so brittle, yet all together is irresistible. So a large number of inconsistencies and insincerities may make God powerless to help you, or to work mightily through you to the salvation of others. He may be in the midst of you, and you may be called by His name ; great issues for His kingdom and glory may seem at stake ; mighty possibilities within your reach ; and yet He is as a mighty man that cannot save.

There is might enough in God to save the weakest and sinfullest of His children ; and you are unsaved because of the limitations you have placed upon Him. First, you are not absolutely willing to be delivered from your sins. Secondly, you do not entirely believe in His power and will. Thirdly, you have not definitely handed the whole matter over to Him, and believed that He has accepted the charge.

Or—and this is perhaps the deepest reason of all—you have formed your own ideas of Divine truth, and of the possible Christian life. And having formed your own conception of the true ideal of Christianity, you have thenceforth lived within the limitations of your ideal, which is bounded by human wisdom and human thought. And so you never come to a thorough knowledge of the indwelling of Christ, or what He is prepared to do for you ; or, catching a glimpse of it from afar, you are not sufficiently delivered from the reasonings and workings of your mind to give Him that opportunity for which He waits and yearns. The Lord Jesus could do infinitely more in us, and through us, if we did not hinder. Be sure that the Kingdom of God is within ; but you must let it possess you.

*If thou return, then will I bring thee again, that thou mayest stand before Me. Jer. xv. 19 (R. V.).*

WHAT a promise for backsliders is this! Here is a soul that had gone away from God's presence, and had ceased to be as His mouth. How long it had been in this castaway condition we need not inquire. It is enough to know that it had dipped beneath the horizon, and been permitted to know the bitter anguish of seeing others do its chosen work. Have you known this? Then these words were written for you; eat them, and let them be unto you the joy and rejoicing of your heart.

Will you return to God? Do you want it to be as in the old time? Tell Him so, and He will bring you again. It will not take Him a second's space to restore you to where you were wont to stand. Dare to believe that you are there again, forgiven, cleansed, sanctified. Live there. Go no more out forever.

Will you leave what is vile, unworthy, and unholy, casting it away as so much dross, and take forth only the gold, silver, and precious stones, of a holy character? then God will make you His mouth, through which He will speak to saint and sinner. Is not this worth whatever it may cost you? Remember how Peter sinned; but within fifty days he was speaking as the mouth of the Holy Ghost to thousands.

It was thus, also, that Mark was brought again, who forsook the apostle, in his first missionary journey, but he was honored, as the mouth of the Holy Spirit, to write the Gospel that bears his name.

"I know not what I am, but only know

I have had glimpses tongue may never speak :

No more I balance human joy or woe,

But think of my transgressions, and am meek.

Saviour! forgive the child who sinnèd so—

His proud heart yields—the tears are on his cheek."

*O Lord, my strength, and my stronghold, and my refuge in the day of affliction. Jer. xvi. 19 (R. V.).*

ONE of the puritans was accustomed to describe prayer as the flight of the lonely man to the only God. There is such prayer here. This man is very lonely. He is like a speckled bird, set on by all the birds of the flock. He looks right and left, but there is no man to care for his soul; then he addresses himself to God in these touching words.

*My strength.*—The psalmist spoke of God as the strength of his life. The apostle of love said that little children could overcome the world, because He that was in them was greater and stronger than he that was in the world. “God is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid.”

*My stronghold.*—A stronghold is what holds strongly. A keep is that which keeps. We keep God’s deposit, which is His Gospel: God keeps our deposit, which is ourselves. And none, man nor devil, can snatch us away.

*My refuge in the day of affliction.*—The night darkening the sky drives the chicks to the hen’s wings; so affliction drives us to God. “In the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.”

Do you wish to know Him thus? See that you do not burden yourself by your endeavors. God is a Spirit, and within your spirit. You need not ascend into heaven, nor descend into the deep. You need not weary yourself with the reasonings and reflections and questionings of your mind or heart. By these means you will wander further from Him and His knowledge. *Be still and know.* Enter into the still and peaceful land of inward spiritual fellowship. Commune with your own heart. Be a child before Him, innocent, unaffected, unrestrained.

*Bear no burden on the Sabbath-day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem.* *Jer. xvii. 21.*

IN the R. V. *marg.*, "take heed to yourselves" is rendered "take heed for your life's sake," as if the matter dealt with in this paragraph closely pertained to the conditions of the best life. And is it not so? Is it not a matter of vital importance that we should keep the eternal Sabbath in our hearts, and suffer no burden to be brought through the gates of the soul? Even if we consider this matter from the lowest aspect, how certain it is that absence of worry and fret promotes length of days! But in the deepest sense we must, like Jeremiah, set a guard at the city portals, and insist that no anxiety should cross our threshold. Do you ask what sentry is strong enough to arrest the intrusion of burden-bearing thoughts? I reply, let the peace of God *keep* your mind and heart. Meet every anxiety with the one short, strong, sweet answer—God; God will see to it; God will provide.

In verse 24 we are bidden diligently to hearken to God in this matter. It must therefore be within our power. The will can direct the thoughts to what object it chooses. Do not look down, but up; not backward or forward, but God-ward. It is right to think calmly and deliberately about the issues of things; but the allowance of foreboding anxiety is a positive sin against the love of God.

The result is beautiful. Obey God in this, and the King Himself shall enter the gates of your city (ver. 25). Your life will be filled with burnt-offerings and frankincense and thanksgiving (ver. 26). And from the perfect balance and rest of your nature you will be able to look out with equanimity on the storm and change around. We which have believed do enter into the Sabbathism which remaineth.

*He made it again.*

*Jer. xviii. 4.*

GOD wants to make the very best He can of each of His children. He puts us on His wheel, and subjects us to the discipline which He deems most likely to secure our greatest blessedness and usefulness. But, alas! how often He finds a marred vessel left on His hands when He desired and sought perfect beauty and strength! This is through no failure on His part; but because some bubble of vanity or grit of self-will has hindered Him.

Alas, how many have marred His work! What might we not have been, if only we had perfectly yielded to Him! It is enough to break our hearts to recall all the wasted and misspent years, when He would, but we would not.

When this has been the case, He does not cast us utterly away; but puts us afresh upon the wheel, and "makes us again." If He cannot do what He desired at the first, He will still make the best of us; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. Let God take your life which has hitherto proved a failure; He will make of what remains of it more than men could make with all earthly advantages on their side, and with nothing to hinder its regular development.

Yield yourself afresh to God. Confess that you have marred His work. Humbly ask that He should make you again, as He made again Jacob and Peter and John and Mark. Only be careful in all time to come—first, to give God sufficient opportunity by waiting before Him; and secondly, to be very prompt to obey all that He may impress upon you as being His holy will. There is simply no limit to the progress and development of the soul which is able to meet God with a never-faltering "Yes." Let the life-like clay in the potter's hands be plastic to its Maker's touch!

*A potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again.*

*Jer. xix. 11.*

THESE words were spoken first of the inevitable judgments which were to befall Jerusalem. She who had been a chosen vessel was now to be broken beyond repair.

An earthen vessel is a true emblem of human life, so frail, so brittle. But there is something frailer yet in our resolutions and efforts after holiness. And when once these have failed us, we can never be again what we were. Always the crack, the rivets, the mark of the join.

In Gideon's days there was a light within the earthen vessels; and when these were broken it shone forth. There is, therefore, a breaking of the vessel which is salutary and desirable. And it is of this that Miss Taylor sings:—

“ Oh to be nothing, nothing !  
Only to lie at His feet,  
A broken and emptied vessel,  
For the Master's use made meet.”

It reminds me of a piece of pottery I saw in the mountain burn, which was in the water and the water in it. If there be in any one of us a proud and evil disposition, a masterful self-will, which frets for its own way and makes itself strong against God, then indeed we may ask to be so broken as never to be whole again. “Take me—break me—make me,” is a very wholesome prayer for us all.

The apostle speaks of the heavenly treasure in the earthen vessel. How wonderful it is that God should put so much of His spiritual ointment into such common and ordinary receptacles ! No one detects what is in the saints till they are broken by sickness, pain, trouble; then the house is filled with the odor of the ointment.

*I am weary with forbearing and cannot contain.*

*Jer. xx. 9 (R. V.).*

THE prophet had looked for marvellous results from his preaching. So great was his consciousness that God's word was on his lips, and His power with him, that he expected by his ministry to arrest the decay of his people. And when, instead of the success he sought, he found himself in the stocks, he was tempted to feel that God had excited hopes which were not destined to be realized. He did not give sufficient weight to man's awful power of resisting and neutralizing God's best designs. We say this reverently, and use human methods of speech.

Yet, on the other hand, as he reviewed the steps by which he had come to act and speak as he did, he felt that he could not have done differently. And though he were suddenly to repress himself, the Divine inward impulse would sweep away all his constraints, and assert itself in irresistible might. It was of no use placing the bushel over the light, for the light would burn the bushel; useless to shut in the fire, for the fire would burn through every obstacle to its flames.

What a glorious state of heart to be in ! We have sometimes been weary in God's service ; but oh, it would be a greater weariness if we were dismissed from it. To speak is an awful responsibility and weight ; but not to speak would be impossible. Have you the burning heart ? Do you know what it is to feel unable to contain yourself, since the love of Jesus constrains ? If not, daily pray that God may light a burning fire in your bones.

“ O God ! make free  
This barren, shackled earth, so deadly cold ;  
Breathe gently forth Thy spring, till winter flees  
In rude amazement ! ”



*Peradventure the Lord will deal with us according to all His wondrous works.*

*Jer. xxi. 2 (R. V.).*

IT was during the last extremity of the siege that Zedekiah sent this message to Jeremiah. His people and he had postponed their compliance with the warnings and invitations of God's love till the last possible hour, and now they were more eager for immunity from the consequences of their sins than to repent and return to God. The answer was immediate—that matters must now be allowed to take their course. It was, however, added that even now all who dared to act in faith and go out to the besiegers would save their lives.

What a test of faith was here ! It seemed as though it were worth while to risk everything and stay in the city rather than venture out to those terrible hosts that were gathered around. But there was no alternative. To stay in the city was certain death ; to go forth into what seemed certain death would secure life. Men may reach a certain point in wrongdoing when the disasters their sins have courted are inevitable. As they have sown, they must reap. They have set the rocks rolling, and they must see the devastation wrought on their homes. Yet, even then, there is a way of escape.

Still God pleads with men, as in the 8th verse : “Thus saith the Lord, Behold I set before you the way of life and the way of death. He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword ; he that goeth out and falleth away to the Chaldeans shall live.” This surely is the exact counterpart of the words which our Lord is recorded as having spoken on four different occasions : “He that loveth his life shall lose it ; and he that loseth his life for My sake, the same shall save it.” There is a strange reversal of human imaginations at the cross of Christ !

*Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness.*  
*Jer. xxii. 13.*

THIS denunciation was probably against the king himself. But it has a much fuller reference. He was the godless son of a godly father, whose character is sketched in three particulars. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; it was well with him; it was to know God. But the son had reversed all this. He built his palace of unrighteousness, his chambers of covetousness; but its width of space could not obliterate the memory of the forced and unpaid labor by which it had been reared. And God would plead and avenge the cause of those oppressed laborers.

When we see the splendid piles of business buildings reared by monopolists who thrive by making existence impossible to smaller but industrious tradesmen; when we hear of the vast fortunes made out of strong drink; or the manipulation of the market by millionaires, that make honest business impossible—we recur to these terrible words. God still arises to avenge the cause of the poor and needy. There is a God who judges in the earth.

In our vast cities it is not easy to trace the incidence of the Divine displeasure on a family of wrongdoers. Those who reside in our villages and country towns, and have long memories, could tell of many corroborations in their own knowledge. But there is another side to this. God's children can afford to be generous and openhanded to their employés, because their Father is rich. "He is able to make all grace abound toward us . . . that we may abound." Let us maintain His honor, and His family name, by fair dealing. They who know God, judge the cause of the poor and needy; and for those who do this it is well (ver. 16).

*If they had stood in my council. . . .*

*Jer. xxiii. 22 (R. V.).*

HERE is the cause of so much failure in Christian work—God's servants do not stand in God's council. The previous words explain what is meant by not standing in God's council: "I sent not these prophets, yet they ran; I spake not unto them, yet they prophesied." Alas! these words write our own sentence. Too often we run without being sent, and prophesy because the hour has struck, rather than because the message of God has been given! We do not stand in God's council.

"But if they had stood." . . . We gather, therefore, that the stream of prophetic teaching was not limited to Jeremiah alone. There was no necessary exclusiveness in the Divine arrangements. He was chosen, and used as God's agent and medium, because he stood in His council. And the others might have had the same privilege if they had conformed to the same conditions.

Let us claim the positive assurance of this promise. We see where we have fallen short of God's ideal, but we can retrace our steps; we can renounce our fussy activities; refrain from the desire to be always to the front; and wait more absolutely on God for His thoughts, and words, and messages. A Christian worker once complained to George Müller that he had not time enough for the study of the Word and prayer; and the veteran saint asked in reply, whether an hour's less work, with the soul dwelling in the full light of God, and therefore actuated by His impulses, would not be more prosperous and effective than five hours spent under the perpetual fever of our own will and way. Be right with God, and the people *shall be caused to hear, and shall be turned.*

*And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.*  
*Jer. xxiv. 7.*

AN heart to know! We know God with our heart, the seat of our moral life, and specially of our affections. As the apostle puts it, it is needful that the eyes of our heart should be opened that we should know. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love. He that loveth knoweth God, and is known of Him. If there is anything unloving in your nature, it will blur your knowledge of God, as condensed breath on a window-pane will shut out the fairest landscape. But the heart which knows God is His dear gift. Be willing to have it; ask for it, and it shall be yours.

The special aspect in which we are led to know God is as Jehovah—that He is the I AM, the unchanging, ever-loving one; the God who comes down to deliver and save. This is the aspect that we need most. When overcome with failure and sin; when thoroughly discouraged with abortive efforts; when overtaken by some sudden gust of temptation—we need to know that our sin cannot surprise God, or staunch His love, or wear out His patience.

But what a word is this, that we shall be His people and He our God! Oh, infinite God, how canst Thou take such as we are—nay, I will not speak of others, but of myself—such as I am, to be Thy own peculiar treasure! I dare not look back on my past, or in upon my heart, but only out and away to Thy great mercy; for I am most weak and unworthy. But I will forever adore Thee for choosing me—not because of aught in myself, but for Thy love and mercy's sake. Moreover, Thou hast given me Thyself. What can I want beside Thee? Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.

*Should ye be utterly unpunished?*

*Jer. xxv. 29 (R. V.).*

THIS is a terrible chapter, in which the disasters that were to befall all the surrounding nations are described as a potion presented to each for drinking. If any refuse, the answer is to be given in the words before us, which suggest those of Peter: "The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?" (1 Peter iv. 17).

God always begins with His own people, because their sins traduce His character and bring it into contempt; and because sinners might otherwise establish a just charge of favoritism against Him. Besides, He loves them so dearly that He is eager to see them rid, as soon as may be, from the blight and parasitism of evil. It is a terrible thing to be an inconsistent child of God; for just in proportion to His love for you will God put forth the most strenuous and unremitting efforts to bring you back to Himself. This thought may arrest you when you are being led into sinful ways. You will have to come out of them, sooner or later, if you are truly God's child. But the anguish of your extrication will be in proportion to the sinful delight of your self-indulgence.

It is impossible to advance in the divine life without dealing with the successive evils which the Spirit of God reveals to us; and it is only as we listen to His voice through His servants and His Word that we can know them.

But if the righteous be scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Even though Babylon had done God service, as the instrument of His chastisement to His own people; yet, because in performing thus she had grossly sinned, she must drink the cup of His wrath. O disobedient and ungodly soul, thou mayest serve God's purpose, yet He will not let thee be unpunished. Your condemnation now for a long time lingereth not.

*The Lord sent me to prophesy. . . . Therefore amend your ways and your doings.*

*Jer. xxvi. 12, 13.*

NATURALLY, Jeremiah was constituted with a very nervous and sensitive disposition. He compares himself to a child that cannot speak; he laments that he had been born into such troublous times. But at the moment of his call it was distinctly promised that he should be made from that day "a defenced city, an iron pillar, and brazen walls, . . . against the kings, princes, priests, and people of the land." Though they should fight against him, they should not prevail (Jer. i. 18, 19).

What an admirable comment on that promise is presented by this chapter! Here is this timid man standing alone for God against this surging multitude, in which priest and people are merged. Though his life is in the balance, and it might seem necessary to purchase it by absolute silence, he refuses to hold his peace; he insists that God has sent him, and calls on the maddened crowd to amend their ways and return unto Jehovah. Had John the Baptist spoken thus, or John Knox, we had not been surprised. But for this sensitive, retiring man to speak thus is due to the transforming power of the grace of God.

There is hope here for those who are naturally reticent and backward, reserved and timid. Take your nature to God, and ask Him to encrust it with iron and brass. Above all, seek a vivid realization that God is with you. Then open your mouth and speak. Greater is He that is in and with you, than he that is in the world. To have a conviction that God has sent; to know and feel His inspiration thrilling the soul—is utterly essential to strength of purpose and action. When we know that the living Father hath sent us, and is with us, we can stand as a brazen wall.



*The nation . . . which will not serve the king of Babylon, will I punish.*      *Jer. xxvii. 8.*

IT may be that, like the people of Israel, you have grossly sinned and violated the bonds of holy fellowship and relationship with God. The result of this not improbably has been some form of chastisement and disaster, which lies heavily on your life. This is what the invasion of the king of Babylon was to Israel and the surrounding nations. Now learn from these striking words that your best attitude is one of humble and reverent submission. Put your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon. When Samuel told Eli the inevitable results of his negligence to correct and restrain his son, the old man said, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good." Through the infliction of his troubles he discerned the right-ordering and permissive providence of God.

So let it be with you. Accept the deserved chastisement, remembering that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God. Look beyond the pride and cruelty of man to the permissive providence of your heavenly Father. Set yourself to learn and take well to heart the lessons of the present discipline. It is for a limited period. Do you feel that men meanwhile are going beyond their rights? Avenge not yourself; give place before their wrath; leave the matter with God; vengeance is His—He will recompense.

"To confess ignorance," says a great preacher, "to confess wrong, to admit incapacity, to decline a reputation to which we have no right—these things, and others of the same kind, are often hard and painful, but they are always of the greatest possible value in bracing the character."



*Amen: the Lord do so: the Lord perform thy words. . . . Nevertheless.* *Jer. xxviii. 6, 7.*

THE prophecy of Hananiah of the speedy return of the exiles and the break-up of the power of the king of Babylon was evidently dictated by a desire to win popularity with the people. He spoke in the name of Jehovah, and may even have supposed that his message was divinely given; but his soul was filled with human voices and reasonings, which made him unable to distinguish the still small voice of inspiration. Jeremiah was quite as anxious as he was that his country should be spared further suffering. He uttered a fervent Amen to Hananiah's predictions. Nothing could have given him deeper pleasure than their realization; but standing as he did in the counsels of God, he knew it could not be.

So is it still. Men who follow simply their own thoughts, or are deeply dyed with the spirit of society around, are apt to prophesy smooth things to such as live selfish and worldly lives. "There is no such place as the outer darkness; no such experience as the second death." So they speak. But we know it cannot be. Earnestly as we might wish for it, and say Amen, we know, nevertheless, that it cannot be immaterial how men live, and that wickedness must bring infinite anguish and pain. How terrible will their position be at last, who cried Peace, Peace, when there was none, and encouraged rebellion against the Lord.

There are false prophets still who encourage men in their evil ways, as they paint roseate views of the future, and encourage them to believe that though they sin, the future will not be so dark as they have been led to fear. Hard as it will be for all who perish out of Christ, for these there will be an additional anguish. See Matt. v. 19.

*Seek the peace of the city, whither I have caused you to be carried away captives. Jer. xxix. 7.*

FOR seventy years the captives must make themselves at home and happy in Babylon. It was of no use to scheme and plot a speedier return. They must work out the predicted seventy years; and in the meanwhile let them seek the peace of the great heathen city to which they had been borne, and pray, not only for Jerusalem, but for it.

How many who read these lines are captives in positions against their will and choice. Servants and governesses in worldly homes; apprentices and clerks amid uncongenial associates; travellers in distant towns and commercial hotels; people in all kinds of positions in which they would not choose to be.

The natural tendency of all such is to fret, and begin endeavoring to secure their emancipation and removal. "Let me get away from this as soon as possible." Or, at least, if unable to get free, they take as little interest as possible in their immediate associates, making themselves cold, and stiff, and inaccessible. This is not God's way. Wherever you find yourself, seek the peace and comfort of those about you. Jesus bade us salute those who do not salute us, and lift our voices in intercessory prayer for our oppressors and persecutors.

God had a special purpose in allowing the captivity of His people into Babylon. It was to scatter synagogues and the Old Testament, in preparation for the Gospel. The transportation of Stundists to Siberia will affect the religious life of that great tract for all the future. You are carried into captivity to bring the Gospel to many who would otherwise never hear of it. Wherever God shall open the door, leave behind the bright and genial impression of a holy, loving personality.

*But I will not make a full end of thee.*

*Jer. xxx. 11 (R. V.).*

THERE is a great difference between the punishment of the ungodly and the chastisement of God's children. In the former case there is destruction. The sirocco passed over the grass, and there is nought left but burned and withered stubble. In the latter case there will be restoration and an aftermath.

Are you just now passing through a season of chastisement and pain? Take to heart these tender words : God will not make a full end of you. It may seem as though nothing will be left : the furnace is so hot ; the stock is cut down so near to the ground. But God knows just how much you can bear, and will stay His hand. "I will not make a full end of thee."

He will correct us with judgment. There is need for Him to correct us ; so much requires pruning away, and refining. But if He were not to exercise great judgment, the soul would fail before Him. This is why we are told that the Father is the Husbandman. To no other hand could He entrust this delicate and sacred work : and while His eye and hand are full of eagerness to accomplish His purpose, they always move at the dictate of His judgment. His hand is always on our pulse.

Chastening also anticipates a blessed restoration. This chapter has many tender gleams of hope in it. "I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord." "I will turn again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have compassion on his dwelling-places." Look forward, poor suffering one ! Beyond the dark clouds light is shining on the hills. When the discipline is over the Lord will take you to His care, wash your stripes, restore comforts to you, and give harvests of joy.

*I have loved thee with an everlasting love.*

*Jer. xxxi. 3.*

WE who by faith are the children of Abraham may claim and muse upon these sweet and tender words.

God's love to us is not of to-day or yesterday. It did not originate in any movement of our heart toward Himself, or even on that day of days when Jesus died. You must go back beyond your birth, beyond Calvary and Bethlehem, beyond the fall of man and the Garden of Eden, and as you stand looking out into the immensity of eternity, dare to believe that you were loved and chosen in Christ, the object of God's most tender solicitude and pity.

Does the thought overpower you? Notice the Divine asseveration. Yea, there can be no doubt about it. Beyond this Divine asseveration it is impossible for us to go. By word and oath God, who cannot lie, has given us strong assurance that it is even so.

But now see what comes out of this long, long love. God must have known the worst about us before He set His love on us; then He cannot be surprised as, in the work of education, He comes across evils that horrify and dismay us. He knew all this, and worse. Only let that love have its way. It is a universal and invincible solvent. It will yet rid you bit by bit of these hard and evil elements. The very rocks shall flow down at His presence.

The R. v. marginal reading gives a further thought. The fountains of God's love rise in eternity, and therefore cannot be exhausted by the demands of time. He will continue His loving-kindness. Resisted, disappointed, disregarded, His compassions will not fail until they have overcome and expelled our selfishness, and filled us with the love of God.

*I bought the field.*

*Jer. xxxii. 9.*

WHAT could better manifest the heroic audacity of faith? The Chaldeans infested the land, and Jeremiah knew by the word of the Lord that they were destined to hold both it and the city. And yet at the Divine command he bought a piece of land which was in possession of the foe, with as much formality as though he were at once to enter upon its possession.

He obeyed the Divine command, and then poured out his soul in prayer; nourishing his faith by the contemplation of the might of God in creation, for which nothing was too hard. Surely if God could make the heavens and the earth by His great power and by His stretched-out arm, He could easily bring it to pass that the Chaldeans should recede from the land, Israel again inhabit it, and the purchase and tenure of property be unhindered. Faith made the unseen visible, and the distant near; and enabled the prophet to take them into his calculations, and regulate his action in view of them. Herein the man of faith differs from others. They base their calculations and actions upon certain facts and considerations which are within view of their senses; while he takes into his estimate a number of other facts and considerations of which they have no knowledge, and which can only be recognized through the revelation of God's Spirit.

As that land was purchased, though still in the enemy's possession—so Israel is God's possession, though under the bondage of unbelief; so the bodies of God's saints are His purchased possession, though now under the reign of corruption; so does this world belong to Christ. O man of faith, count on these things as facts.

*Call unto Me, and I will answer thee.*

*Jer. xxxiii. 3.*

WE must learn the sacred art of prayer. God says, "Call unto Me." He likes us to address Him in prayer. We may surely believe that He will do the best, but this may degenerate into a subtle excuse for lethargy; and therefore we must be stirred by the invitation to call upon Him. There is no assurance that He will show us these great and difficult things, unless we obey the injunction of our text to call on Him. But be sure and wait before Him until He teaches you what to pray for. The prayer which is born of God rises to God from whom it came with the certainty of an answer.

*God seeks intercessors.*—He longs to dispense larger blessings. He longs to reveal His power and glory as God, His saving grace, His comfort and peace. But He is limited by the smallness and fewness of our prayers. He cannot do what He would for the Church in the world, because of our unbelief. He cries to us, Call unto Me, call unto Me. Little prayer, little blessing; more prayer, more blessing; much prayer, much blessing.

But what a promise is here! We long to see *great* things done for God in our churches and mission halls, in the hearts and lives of our friends. We long to see the *difficult* things unknotted, so that the crooked may be made straight, and the rough smooth. But all these things shall be. The impossibilities of your life are possible to God. The mysteries of your life can yield their secrets at the summons of God. The iron gates shall open, the sea divide, the sepulchres yield their dead. Only get right with God; only let God have unhindered way through your life; only dare to believe that you have already obtained your petition, and go forward in faith.



*The words of the covenant which they made before Me.*

*Jer. xxxiv. 18.*

*THESE* are suggested, borrowed from an old saint's memoirs, as suitable words for a covenant before God. My Jesus,—I own myself to be Thine, my only Saviour and Bridegroom, Christ Jesus. I am Thine, wholly and eternally. I renounce from my heart all right and authority that Satan unrighteously gave me over myself, from this day henceforward.

From this sacred hour, remembering how Thou through Thy precious blood didst purchase me for Thyself, agonizing even unto death, and praying till Thy blood fell as sweat to the ground, I desire that I may be Thy treasure and Thy bride.

From now and onward, I offer to Thee my heart and my love, my intellect and my thoughts, my choice and my purpose, my spirit, soul, and body, to be absolutely at Thy disposal.

Let Thy will henceforth be done in me. Command, rule, and reign in me. I yield myself up without reserve; and I desire, with Thy help and power, rather to give up the last drop of this my blood, than knowingly and willingly, in my heart or life, to be untrue and disobedient to Thee. Behold Thou hast me wholly and completely, sweet Friend of my soul. Thy Spirit be my keeper; Thy death my assurance of salvation; Thy life my inspiration.

I desire to hold my friendships, my possessions, my gifts and talents at Thy disposal, accounting them Thy gift to help me fulfill my life-course with better success. Accept me and them, and show how best all may be used in Thee and for Thee. Enable me by Thy Holy Spirit to be true to this holy covenant while life shall last; and may I be presented at last, faultless, in Thy presence, with exceeding joy.



*Jonadab, the son of Rechab, shall not want a man to stand before Me forever. Jer. xxxv. 19.*

THE point here is the contrast between the strict obedience of the Rechabites to the directions of their ancestors, and the disobedience of Israel to Jehovah. How often is this contrast repeated still! We find men so eager and devoted to the customs and traditions of their families, and so regardless of the yet higher claims of God. It is very wonderful! We should have thought that the temper of mind which bound men to their family traditions would have secured their allegiance to the Almighty. But it is not so, as daily experience proves.

Let us also notice the obvious inference from this chapter. If, because of their obedience to the regulations of Jonadab, the Rechabites should never want a man to stand before God, how much more will obedience to the promptings of God's Spirit secure, through His mercy, a perpetual standing before His face; not only of ourselves, but of our children. Christian parents, you have a perfect right to go to God with this fair deduction from His own words, and say: Give us grace to obey Thy commandments, and keep all Thy precepts; and do according to all that Thou commandest; and then grant to us to stand before Thee forevermore in Thy presence-chamber; and not us only, but our children and children's children. Let them be a godly seed on earth, ever maintaining sweet recollections of our character and life; and let us be a united family in the presence of Thy glory with exceeding joy. How blessed that man is who, like Elijah, stands before God!

“Jesus protects: my fears, be gone!  
What can the Rock of Ages move?  
Safe in Thy arms I lay me down,  
Thy everlasting arms of love.”

*The king cut it with a penknife, and cast it into the fire.*

*Jer. xxxvi. 23 (R. V.).*

IT was an audacious and foolish act. Only a fool or a madman could have trifled thus. He did not relish the prophet's words, and so he cut them to pieces; but though he destroyed them, he could not in this way arrest the penalties which they foretold. Indeed, he increased them: "There were added besides unto them many like words." The criminal may tear up the warrant for his arrest; but it will not help his case. The captain may destroy the map which indicates the rocks in his course; but that will not rob them of the cruel fangs with which they will pierce the timbers of his ship. Men may deride and destroy the Bible; but this will not empty the future of hell, or hell of its bitter remorse.

We are all tempted to use the penknife to God's Book. There are passages in it which we do not like; those that cross our favorite notions, our cherished sins. Practically, we eliminate them. We never read them, or we explain them away, or profess to doubt their inspiration. We have no right to set certain passages of Scripture aside because they conflict with our notions of truth or system of theology. The scientific man will not adopt a law while one fact refuses to be included in it. The commercial man will not close his books while a shilling is unaccounted for. Blessed as the habit is of listening for God's voice within, we must never forget the absolute necessity of its corroboration from the words of Scripture.

It is wise, therefore, to read the Scriptures with an open and unbiassed mind, not bringing our preconceptions, like penknives, to cut out what we do not agree with, but meekly inquiring what it may please the Lord our God to speak.

*They gave him daily a loaf of bread out of the bakers' street.*  
*Jer. xxxvii. 21 (R. V.).*

THIS was God's way of caring for His child. His life was secured to him from the hatred of his foes, and his daily bread, as long as there was any to be had. If you do God's work, you may freely count on Him. He will not fail. In the most unlikely ways your bread shall be given you, and your water shall be sure.

But it may be objected that it is not always so, and that many of God's children are at this very hour suffering the need of many things which are absolutely necessary. But, first, we should have to decide what is really necessary. We might all be deprived of many of the comforts and luxuries of life without detriment. Indeed, it might be better for all of us to undergo something of the weaning and detaching process. But Matt. vi. 32, 33 is always true.

And, moreover, we should have to inquire whether faith had been exercised to seek and obtain their contents. We have God's promises; but we too often fail to plead them. We know that we can only receive the benefits of Christ's Redemption by faith; but we do not see that the same faith is requisite to bring into our hands those other boons which are included in God's guarantees to His children. You have not, child of God, either because you ask for things that would minister simply to appetite and sense; or because you do not exercise the child's privilege of prayer. Perhaps your present privation is intended to teach you the blessedness of prayer. Ask and receive, that your joy may be full.

“Can it be true, the grace He is declaring?

Oh, let us trust Him, for His words are fair!

Man, what is this, and why art thou despairing?

God shall forgive thee all but thy despair.”

*Obey. . . . So it shall be well with thee, and thy soul shall live.* *Jer. xxxviii. 20 (R. V.).*

OF many Christians it can hardly be said that their souls *live*; they exist, but do not thrive. The food of the soul is in part the Word of God; but in part it is obedience. As we obey we are fed; for our Master said, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work" (John iv. 34). The same truth is suggested here; if we obey the voice of the Lord, it is well with us, and our soul thrives.

The voice of God speaks from the page of His Word. Let us not accept that to be His voice which does not come to us through Scripture, or is not corroborated by Scripture. But let us be very careful to obey God's Word, so far as we know it, even when, as in Zedekiah's case, it seems to contradict all the suggestions of prudence and common-sense. Better be with God in a minority of one, than have the plaudits of an immense host of godless men.

How well I remember, years ago now, entering the bed-chamber of an eminent saint, one autumn morning, whose diminishing candles told how long he had been feeding on the Word of God. I asked him what had been the subject of his study. He said he had been engaged since four o'clock in discovering all the Lord's positive commandments, that he might be sure that he was not wittingly neglecting any one of them. It is very sad to find how many in the present day are neglecting to observe to do the Lord's precepts—concerning His ordinances, concerning the laying-up of money, the evangelization of the world, and the manifestation of perfect love. They know the Lord's will, and do it not. They appear to think that they are absolved from that "observing to do," which was so characteristic of Deuteronomy. As though Love were not more inexorable than Law!

*Because thou hast put thy trust in Me.*

*Jer. xxxix. 18.*

WHAT will not trust do? It will draw out of God for us the most wonderful exhibitions of His tender and mighty provision on our behalf. Who can put a limit on what God will do for the man who trusts Him? Here was the whole city given up to bloodshed and fire. The utmost confusion prevailed. No quarter was shown to the hapless Jews, pursued from house to house, from street to street, by the brutal soldiery. Yet because Ebed-melech trusted in God, and because he evidenced his faith by his loving care for the prophet, he was not given into the hand of the men of whom he was afraid.

Some who read these words may be greatly afraid. They dwell among lions, among men whose words are a sharp sword. But let them trust in the living God; and, in the meanwhile, go on each day ministering as well as they can to God's Jeremiahs. It is not enough to let down ropes to help them; it is a great sign of the love of God to put some rags to keep the ropes from chafing the tender skin. When God comes to help us, He always combines the strong rope with the old clout. Let us resemble Him in this.

Let us trust Him more. Too many resemble the stone-breaker who came into a vast estate, but was content to live in the lodge. When an old friend came to congratulate him, and see over the property, he said: "There! It is all in those parchments; but I have never been to see for myself what there is." Let us possess our possessions, and learn how much God will do for those who trust Him.

"Oh, could I tell, ye surely would believe it!

Oh, could I only say what I have seen!

How should I tell, or how can ye receive it—

How, till He bringeth you where I have been?"

*The captain of the guard gave him victuals, and a present, and let him go. Jer. xl. 5 (R. V.).*

THIS captain seems to have had a remarkable insight into God's dealings with Israel. In verse 3 he speaks quite prophetically; and in this treatment of the prophet he gives every sign of having been admitted into the secret councils of the Most High. He is a comrade of the centurions of the New Testament.

But the interesting matter is the care exercised by God over His servant. During the siege his bread had been given him, and his water had been sure. And now, in spite of all the plottings and devisings against his life, he was the one man of Israel who was treated with respect and provided with an honorable maintenance.

God is able to supply the need of His servants in very remarkable ways; now through ravens, or a widow, and again through a captain of Nebuchadnezzar's guard. If we will be all for God, God will be all for us. In the present instance the men who were so eager to save themselves perished in the capture of the city; whilst the one man who sought to do God's will, with a single purpose, not only saved his life, but found all things else added to him.

God would have us live free from care. He made the spirit, and will see that it gets its allowance of sustenance. He made the soul, and knows how much love and culture it requires. He made the body, and will provide for its food and clothing. Do not fear the rough servants whom He employs as the distributors of His gifts. Under the mailed armor a warm heart is beating.

“Give me to trust Thee, Lord,  
In the dark and stormy night,  
When morning seems so slow to come,  
And the stars are hid from sight.”



*Then arose Ishmael . . . and smote Gedaliah  
. . . with the sword.* *Jer. xli. 2.*

THIS chapter is full of horrible atrocities. Blow on blow befell the already decimated remnant of Jews. Had it not been for Ishmael's ruthless vandalism, the vine of Israel might yet have struck her roots downward and borne fruit upward.

We must ask for more of that profound faith which, through all blinding mystery, sees the Divine purpose, weaving events and men into its plans, and compelling all to work together for the discipline or aid of His children. "Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps ; fire, and hail ; snow, and vapors ; stormy wind fulfilling His word." "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee ; the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain" (Psalms cxlviii. 7, 8 ; lxxvi. 10).

What a comfort it is to know that all things in heaven, earth, and hell ; all demons and men ; all Nebuchadnezzars and Ishmaels—are under the control of our heavenly Father ! They may hate us with all the power of their evil natures, but they cannot hurt us beyond His permission ; and as soon as they have fulfilled what He deemed necessary, they will be withdrawn. There are no second causes for us. We are always dealing first-hand with God, though He may employ many strange servants to bring us His messages.

"A God-inspired Expectation, a Holy Patience, has always been the mark of a true believer, at the most critical periods in the history of the Church and of the individual. She first made hope vocal in the soul of Isaiah ; fasted and prayed with Anna in her long widowhood ; was at the cross with the mother ; at the grave with the Magdalene ; and hired the room for Pentecost."



*We will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send thee.*  
*Jer. xlii. 6.*

WHILST the people said this with their lips, they had already set their faces to go into the land of Egypt (vers. 15, 17). It is useless to profess our desire to know God's will, whilst in our secret heart we are determined to follow a certain course, come what may. Indeed it is worse than useless; it is blasphemous. How often do believers ask for prayer that their course may be made clear, when in point of fact they have already decided on it, and are secretly hoping to turn God to their own side!

But what a solemn responsibility devolves on those who are sent to and fro between God and man, as Jeremiah was. He realized that he was sent by the people unto the Lord, and that he was sent back again by the Lord unto the people (ver. 21). He knew, too that their faces were set on having their own evil way. But he never flinched from declaring the will of God, nor turned to the right or left, to curry favor from man. By nature very timid and sensitive, see how God made him a defenced city, an iron pillar, and brazen walls. Verily he stood in God's council, and caused the people to hear his words. What a contrast to the false prophets of ch. xxiii. !

Compare this statement concerning Gerhard Tersteegen: "His service was always marked by a diffident and retiring spirit, though ever by a courageous valor for the truth. It is recorded that on one occasion, in going with a friend to a meeting where he was expected to give an address, he said, 'I would rather hide myself from all the world than let myself be seen and heard.' But he never swerved a hair's-breadth when the honor of God and the testimony of the truth was concerned."

*Baruch the son of Neriah setteth thee on against us.*  
*Jer. xliii. 3.*

WHEN men do not like the Word of God, they imagine that some one has set the speaker on against them. A poor woman came to us a few weeks ago, in a terrible condition. She had induced her husband to come to a service, and the address seemed so exactly adapted to him, dealing with his sins in the plainest terms, that nothing could convince him that she had not given the preacher a full and detailed account of his life, and had set the speaker on against him. When they got home he ill-treated her with great cruelty. But that service and her patient suffering were ultimately overruled to work a great change in him.

How strange it is that ungodly men always think the Word of God is against them, whereas *they* are set against it! The wind would not be so keen in their teeth, if they were not steaming so quickly against it.

But there is a solemn lesson here for us all. Whenever the Word of God makes us wince, or God's messenger presses sorely on us, we are apt to turn aside the point by some superficial and unreasonable excuse. We catch up the first foil we can lay hands on, in order to ward off the missile. We find some excuse to blunt the edge of the sword. It is easy to impute a bad and personal motive. There is always a Baruch the son of Neriah in the question. It is not we who are wrong, but the prophet who is prejudiced against us. As Ahab said of Micaiah, "I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." We can only grow in the divine life by exposing ourselves to the reproofs and searchings of the divine Word; and allowing them their due weight.

*Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate.*

*Jer. xliv. 4.*

THERE is a personal element in sin. It is not simply a violation of law, the law of the moral universe. It is against our own soul (ver. 7), and, above all, it hurts the holy, loving nature of God, so that His Spirit cries out as in agony, "Oh, do it not!" There is something very pathetic in this cry, extorted by the sin of man from the heart of God. It reminds one of that cry of Jesus, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, and suffer you?"

If any one suffers very keenly from nervous exhaustion, it seems sometimes almost impossible for him to bear the noise of a child who persists in running heavily overhead. He will adopt a pleading rather than an angry tone: "My child, do not do this again; I cannot bear it." Let us think of God's holy nature as more sensitive to sin than the most highly-strung nerves to noise, and hear Him saying, whenever we are on the point of committing sin, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate."

How greatly God hates sin is taught us in the Cross. In order to put it away He spared not His only-begotten Son, but yielded Him to the bitterness of Calvary.

And how greatly the blessed Son hates it is evident from the bloody sweat of Gethsemane, when the shadow of the great burden of a world's guilt lay upon Him.

And how greatly must the Holy Spirit, whose temple is our body, hate any sin that defiles it! Thus the Holy Trinity, with one voice, pleads with thee, who meditate evil. Beware of bringing pain into the heart of Infinite Love; but ask that some of God's hate for sin may be yours.

*Thou didst say, Woe is me now ! . . . but thy life will I give thee.*  
*Jer. xlv. 3, 5.*

TROUBLE is an inevitable part of human experience. "Man that is born of a woman," we are told, "is of few days and full of trouble." In addition to their share in the common heritage of man, it often falls to the lot of God's saints to suffer specially in connection with His kingdom and glory. They know the fellowship of His sufferings. They sigh and cry for all the abominations which are being wrought in their midst. The very association of Baruch with Jeremiah extorted the groan, "Woe is me now ! for the Lord hath added sorrow to my pain."

But out of our sorrow and pain, when borne patiently and trustfully, comes the more abundant life. "Behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh ; but thy life will I give unto thee." Pain casts a vail on all our pleasant earthly things, so that we take no further interest in them, and turn our thoughts to the unseen and eternal. Sorrow drives us to the God of all comfort. By the fire our dross is consumed. Through travail of soul the characteristics of godliness are born. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and *die*, it abides alone ; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

God often reveals ourselves to ourselves till we cry, Woe is me now ! When God's light discovers our sins of appetite, of avarice, meanness, and niggardliness ; of temper, fretfulness, and peevishness ; of lack of conscientiousness, the partial fulfillment of promises, unfaithfulness, and misunderstandings. When we think of the want of constancy, truth, prayer, faith, and love, we are plunged in despair. Woe is me now ! But out of all this there springs abundant life, and we rejoice that the great Revealer did not spare.

*Fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith the Lord; for I am with thee.* *Jer. xlv. 28.*

THIS chapter is full of the clash and crash of war. In the most graphic and stirring words, the prophet describes the tide of Egyptian invasion, as its waters toss themselves upon the iron phalanxes of Babylon, like a rock-bound coast; to recoil, defeated and broken, into myriads of foam-drops. The result to the great empire of Egypt is disastrous; her gods and kings are not able to save her from her justly-deserved punishment; she drinks the cup of indignation and wrath to her destruction.

But, amid it all, God remembers His people. They, too, are suffering from the results of their sins. And as they hear of all that has befallen greater nations than themselves, they may well fear that their own fate will no less be irremediable and final. If the great kingdom of Egypt has received its death wound, from which it must slowly bleed to death, what hope can there be for Israel, captive in Babylon, while Canaan lies waste? To such fears God speaks words of tender comfort and reassurance. "Fear not thou, neither be dismayed; I will make a full end of all the nations, but I will not a full end of thee; I will not leave thee unpunished, but will correct thee in measure; I will save thee from afar."

Oh, blessed words! If we have become the children of God by faith in Jesus; if God has ever entered into covenant with our souls; if He has taken us to be His and to give us His best—then, though we suffer chastisement, we shall not be overwhelmed by it: though we are corrected, diminished, and brought low, God will not make a full end of us: though we are pruned, we shall not be cut down to the ground. We may even look out with a quiet mind on the irretrievable disasters which overtake the ungodly.

*O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet?*  
*Jer. xlvii. 6, 7 (R. V.).*

O SWORD of the Lord; thou hast wounded us sore! Like a two-edged sword, the Word of God has pierced to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, of the joints and marrow. How deeply it has penetrated; how sharply it has cut! And even now it cannot rest. The work of discrimination and separation is still going on within us. We are constantly seeing new depths of our own utter worthlessness and evil. Possibilities of our own bad hearts, of which we had not dreamed, arise to confront us. And immediately the Divine sword sets itself to hack and hew and cut away the evil growth of selfishness, of which we have caught a glimpse.

There are times in our lives when we cry, "O thou sword of the Lord, how long ere thou be quiet: rest and be still." Will the process of purification and deliverance never be complete? Will not the destructive work of God soon end? The operation has lasted months and years; when will the Divine Surgeon lay down the knife? O knife of God, rest thee!

But how can it be quiet, seeing that the work is not done? We are not yet rid of the last remains of sin. The wound is not yet probed to the bottom. The roots of the cancerous growth of selfishness have not yet been entirely removed; and if any one of them remains, all the work will have to be done again. How can it be quiet, seeing that God loves us too well to allow us to bear with us into eternity aught that will hinder our perfect fruition of bliss? How can it be quiet, seeing that this is the only world where pain can reach His saints; and He must do His work quickly, ere we reach the land where the sword is placed in its scabbard, and stilled forever.



*Moab hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel.*

*Jer. xlviii. 11 (R. V.).*

THIS beautiful and appropriate imagery, borrowed from the vineyard, speaks for itself. It would be readily appreciated by the peasant populations that toiled amid the terraced hills of Moab. To prevent scum and sediment, the newly-made wine was emptied from one vessel to another until it reached the condition of perfect fluidity. In Moab's case there had been nothing comparable to this, and therefore the rank, coarse taste remained in him, and he had settled on his lees.

What an insight this affords of God's method with the souls of men! Why these constant removals from town to town; from church to church; from situation to situation? Why this perpetual change and revolution in our plans? Why this incessant going into captivity to irksome and trying circumstances? All this is part of God's manufacture of the wine of life. We must be emptied from vessel to vessel, else we should settle on our lees, and become thick and raw and unpalatable. When the next change comes in your life, do not fear it. The blessed God will see to it that no drop of the precious fluid shall be spilt on the ground. With the tenderest care He conducts the whole operation.

Perhaps there is a counterpart to this incessant change from place to place in the perpetual flux of our emotions. We never feel the same for long together. We are constantly being emptied from one blessed frame into another, not quite so joyous or peaceful. We have to hold the most heavenly emotions with a light hand, not knowing how soon they may have passed. And it is well. Otherwise we should never lose the taste of our proud self-complacency.



## *Dwell deep.*

*Jer. xlix. 8.*

AS originally spoken, these words summoned the people of Edom to seek the shadows of impenetrable forests, and retire into the secrecy of the caves and dens of the rocks. The deeper their hiding-place, the better it would be when the storm of invasion swept across the land.

*Dwell deep in the peace of God.*—God's peace is so deep and blessed that it cannot be fathomed or explained; the fugitive into its sacred secrets cannot be followed or dragged forth to perish by the merciless pack of the wolves of care. Men of the world cannot understand that mystery of peace; but the believer knows the way into it, and makes it his hiding-place and pavilion. He sleeps like his Master in the stern, while storms sweep the waters.

*Dwell deep in communion with God.*—Hide in God. Get away from the rush and strife around, and go alone into the clear, still depths of His nature. The Rhone loses all its silt in the deep, clear waters of Geneva's lake. A few hasty words of prayer will not avail for this. A day's climb is often necessary before one can reach the heart of the mountains.

*Dwell deep in stillness of soul.*—Do not live on the outside of life, in the outer courts of the temple of the soul. Get within. God awaits thee there. Centre thyself. When the world is full of alarm and harassments, study to be quiet. The soul's health cannot be maintained apart from the observance of times of waiting on God in solitude. The great importance of perseverance in the exercise of prayer and inward retirement may be sufficiently learned, says one, next to the experience of it, merely from the tempter's artifices and endeavors to allure us from it, and make us neglect it.

*They have forgotten their resting-place, their place to lie down in.* Jer. l. 6 (marg.).

THESE words may often be said of us. A time of emergency arises; the necessity for instant and vigorous action seems overpowering; we fail to see what course to adopt—and immediately we get flurried and excited; we run from one to another; we lose our sleep. All our earnest resolutions to abide in Christ and live in His fellowship are forgotten. We have forgotten our resting-place.

Or we are in the midst of a great campaign of work. From morning to night we are plunged in a mass of calculations and activities. There is no time to take our meals, much less to obtain opportunities for prayer and fellowship with God. Our rooms without, our souls *within*, are littered with the symptoms of the many absorbing interests which are monopolizing our attention. We have forgotten our resting-place.

Or, perhaps, it is a time of great temptation. Hour after hour the foe returns to the attack. We have done our best to withstand him; but have hit out without precision, have fired at random. Again, we have forgotten our resting-place.

The place where we lie down to rest is under the shadow of the Cross. Whilst we remain there, we are perfectly safe and blessed. Return unto thy rest, O straying sheep! Back to the arms of Jesus, where only such frail ones as thou art are safe.

I knew a man, who had to bear a thousand crosses belonging to others, and who grieved himself into an illness because others did not love God as He deserves, till all at once his own foolishness and sinfulness struck him to the heart. He could do nothing then but cast himself and them into the endless depths of the love of God; and he ended by having rest in his heart, and a song on his lips.

*Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of his  
God, of the Lord of Hosts.* Jer. li. 5.

YES, indeed, our life has been filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel. We see it now. As we look back upon the past with the light of the present reflected upon it, we see how every day has added its quota of transgression. How bitterly we must have grieved the Holy Ghost ! How terribly have made the Holy One suffer ! Do you wonder that Jesus still appears in heaven as a Lamb as it had been slain !

But He has not forsaken ! As again we review our life, how abundant is the evidence that we have not been forsaken. Forsaken !—Then God's right hand would lose its cunning. Forsaken !—Then the tides that flow through the heart of God would have to leap backward. Forsaken !—Then the eternal purposes would have to be frustrated. Forsaken !—Then the Divine word would be forfeited, and the Divine Son would go without His meed. Sin is mighty ; but there is one thing it cannot do, it cannot make God forsake those whom He has adopted into His family. Sin dragged the archangel to the pit ; but it can never wrench the believer out of the hand of God. Sin brought Christ from the throne to the cross ; but it can never cause God to leave, or cease to care for, His own.

Does this lead you to presumption ? Do you say, Then I may do as I like ? Ah, beware ! Those that talk thus have not the mark of His children. The child loves with the love that fears to grieve God, more than to be forsaken of Him. “The love of Christ constrains me to forsake these things. I have long enough crucified my beloved Saviour with my sins. His love constrains me to renounce all that grieves Him, and live for Him alone.”

*Every day a portion until the day of his death,  
all the days of his life.* *Jer. lii. 34.*

IF the King of Babylon did thus for a captive king, his prisoner, will your heavenly Father do less for you? He created you to need the daily portion, and cannot be oblivious of His own constitution of your nature. You wind up your watch each day, because you know that otherwise it will stop; and God will not be less thoughtful of your constant need of reinforcement. "He knoweth that ye have need of all these things." His faithfulness guarantees that there always will be the portion of good for the body; always the portion of love and light for the soul; always the portion of Holy Spirit quickening for the spirit.

It is easier to die once than to live always. It is not easy to meet the continual demand of recurrent duty; not easy to live a full and strong life, that never dips below the horizon, or sinks in the fountain-basin. But it is possible, when the soul has learned to leave all care with God, waiting on Him for the supply of all its needs, and esteeming that He is the only really satisfactory portion we need.

"Neither prison-walls, nor locks, nor the cruelty of man," said some imprisoned suffering souls, "can obstruct the issues of the Lord's love nor the manifestation of His presence, which is our joy and comfort, and carries us above all sufferings, and makes days and hours and years pleasant to us; which pass away as a moment, because of the enjoyment of seeing Him with whom a thousand years is but as one day."

Those who can trust God in these directions are not only abundantly satisfied of His great goodness, but are able to send portions to others. Like the disciples, they share out their slender supplies and get twelve baskets full in return.

*The Lord is righteous ; for I have rebelled  
against His commandment.* *Lam. i. 18.*

IN these plaintive elegiacs, Jerusalem, by the mouth of the prophet, laments her fate. But the story of her desolation is mingled with confessions of her sin. She asks boldly if any sorrow could be compared to her sorrow, and then confesses that not one pang or stroke had been in excess of her sin. This is what sorrow does for us all.

Sorrow has been fitly called the mother of all joy. She alone creates the darkness, in which we can distinguish the real meaning of God's dealings, and understand the true nature of our wild wanderings. Her neutral tints subdue the soul's pride, and turn it away from the glare of human ambition. Beneath her teaching we learn to view aright the evanescence of all things human, and to see that the eternal is alone real amid a world of illusions.

"Sweet sorrow, who the earth has ever trod,  
Dreaded and shunned, till, by thy burning kiss,  
The heart was fired and flamed serene to God ;  
O kind stern friend, we leave thee on Time's shore,  
The only friend of earth whom we shall see no more."

Perhaps your sorrow will be allowed to press on you more and more sorely till you have been led to self-examination, confession of sin, and acknowledgment of the rightness of God's dealings with you. There is an alloy of pride in your nature that must be destroyed. If the fire is not hot enough, its heat must be raised till it suffices. Accept the lesson of your present pain, and rebel no longer.

The waves of unutterable grief may be breaking in succession against the beaten promontory of your faith, and will be followed by the great tenth wave of apparent desertion : but the return-tide of exultant joy is at hand.

*The prophets have seen visions for thee of vanity and foolishness.*

*Lam. ii. 14.*

THE prophet is addressing Jerusalem—ruined, desolate, and afflicted—the city waste ; her children in Babylon. Of course the main question was as to their return from captivity, and deliverance from their yoke. The false prophets were perpetually seeing visions of deliverance that were never fulfilled. Now this kingdom would come to their rescue ; now that. But they were empty dreams. The captivity would never be turned, until the iniquity which had led to it had been discovered and put away. But the prophets had no desire or ability to do this. Now this is true of yourself as an individual and as a Christian worker.

*As an Individual :* You are suffering in one way or another : in body, or relative, or circumstance. Your one thought is to obtain deliverance, and your mind is filled with vain dreams of how it is to come. It would be better far to ask God to discover to you any reason for the chastisement. If He says nothing, then believe that there is still some wise end in it for yourself or others. But He may indicate some reason for His strokes.

*As a Christian Worker :* Your earnest endeavors have failed. You suppose that some new method will bring success. There may be some reason in yourself which will account for all. Ask God to discover it. When you see it in His light, you will be surprised that you never saw it before ; and you will cease to wonder that those over whom you have longed have never yielded to the love of God. It is useless to have visions of a lovely and holy life, unless you are willing to have your iniquity discovered and destroyed. Oh for faithful prophet-voices to do their office for us !



*Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon Thee : Thou saidst, Fear not. Lam. iii. 57.*

JEREMIAH is referring to his own experiences of the dungeon, into which the malice of his foes had plunged him. As he reached its lowest depths, he began to call upon God, and continued to call. His reliance was on the name (*i. e.*, the nature) of God. This is the most potent argument that any soul can employ. Not our faith, but his faithfulness: not our trust, but his trustworthiness. "Act worthily of that great name, which Thou hast taken for Thyself, O God, we beseech Thee."

No sooner was that appeal made than it was heard. "Thou heardest my voice." Notice that the very breathing of the persecuted soul was heard by the Most High. A mother listens for the breathing of her babe in the dark. It will tell her so much. The soft, measured breath, or the laboring, gasping breath. God never hides His ear from our breathing; or from those inarticulate cries, which express, as words could not do, the deep anguish and yearning of the heart. If you cannot speak, cry, sob, or groan, then be still. God can interpret all.

Then He draws nigh. Of course, He is ever nigh. "Nearer than breathing." But He gives a sweet consciousness of His presence. The dark dungeon of bereavement, or sorrow, suddenly becomes luminous with the radiance of the Shekinah; the stillness is broken by the approaching footfall of the Almighty Friend, who is never so near as when lover and friend are unable to help. Oh, how tenderly He draws nigh! Solitude indeed hath charms, for it is our Saviour's opportunity; and the dungeon becomes desirable, for it is the ante-room to the presence-chamber of our King. Happy they who have learned to detect the secret of the Lord, and His whispered Fear not!



*Of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the nations.* Lam. iv. 20 (R. V.).

THE people tell the sad tale of the pursuit of their foes. Swifter than the eagles, they chased them on the mountains, and laid wait for them in the wilderness. Then they narrate how their king fell into the hands of them who sought his life. He was dear to them as the breath of their nostrils; his person was sacred as the anointed of the Lord; they had thought that even though they were carried into captivity they would find some alleviation to their hardships in dwelling under his protection; they said, "Under his shadow we shall live among the nations." But even *he* was taken in their pits.

What a likeness and a contrast to our blessed Lord! There is LIKENESS. He is as the *breath* of our life. As we inhale the air around us, so we expand our souls to drink in of His most blessed nature. We open our mouths, and inhale Him as our vital element; His Spirit for our spirit; His blood for our souls; His resurrection strength for our bodies. He is the *Anointed* of the Father, who anoints us. Because He is the Christ (Anointed), we are Christians (anointed ones). His *shadow* is a most grateful and wide-spreading one, beneath which we may dwell in safety.

But how great the CONTRAST! Though He was once taken in the pit of Satanic malice and the shadow of death, yet now He liveth to be the shield and protector of His people wherever they are scattered among the nations. He that sitteth on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them. They shall hunger and thirst no more, neither shall the sun strike them. However far our bodies are from one another, we all dwell beneath the shadow of the Lord, which is as a great rock in a weary land.

*Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned. Renew our days as of old. Lam. v. 21.*

WEARY of chastening, and longing to have again all the blessed enjoyments and privileges of the past, the backslider desires to be right with God, as he used to be. But he is often met with great initial difficulties. He would pray, but cannot; he would feel broken and penitent, but his heart is as hard as the nether millstone; he would take the old pleasure in the service and worship of the Most High, but it evades his grasp. This perplexes and daunts him.

What should be our attitude under such circumstances? There is nothing better than to adopt the cry of the prophet, and ask God to turn the soul, and renew its blessed and holy experiences. There will be no doubt of our being turned, if He turns us.

It is not difficult to recover the attitude, emotions, and work of past days, when we have yielded ourselves absolutely to God, and have cast on Him the responsibility of making us all that He has taught us to desire. Let Him assign what standard He chooses, there will be no difficulty in our attaining it, if He fulfills in us all the good pleasure of His will, and the work of faith with power.

The happy life is that which does not need to ask for the olden days to be renewed, because it is ever anticipating that it will be better further on, and that the dawn will grow into the perfect day; but where the past was better than the present is, let us ask that God would restore the years that the caterpillar and cankerworm have eaten. Just because God abides forever, and His throne is from generation to generation, He is able to renew the soul with new pulses of energy and life. Each spring He makes the world as fair as on the morning of creation. "Renew our days as of old."

*When the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them.*

*Ezek. i. 19 (R. V.).*

THESE living creatures, whom Ezekiel afterward recognized as cherubim, represented the entire round of animate existence. The lion's majestic strength, the patient strength and labor of the ox, the keen vision and aspiring flight of the eagle, combined in perfect proportion in their noble forms. The wheels may represent the round of Providence—what we would call the circle of nature. The point for us to notice is the perfect harmony between the spirit, the living creatures, and the wheels; and from this we learn the deep and sacred lesson, that those who live and walk in the Spirit may count on the coöperation of all animate creatures, and the concurrence of Divine providence. When we live consciously and voluntarily in the centre of the Divine will, we are at the centre of many concentric circles, and all things serve us. All things are ours.

If we would be Spirit-taught and guided, we must die to ourselves, to sin, and to the world; no longer seeking anything for ourselves in this world. If, says Pastor Stockmayer, we have treasure outside of Christ, our heart will hasten to where our treasure lies. Only those who account themselves set loose from the things of this world to serve Christ entirely, amid the things of this world, can distinguish the movements of the Spirit.

Each is guided in a way that he knows; and has the special name written on the white stone. God speaks in the depths of our being, far deeper than the region of our feelings, dispositions, or impressions; and He will make Himself heard, if only we are set to obey Him. Let surrender become the abiding habit of life, and the spiritual hearing will be more and more acute.

*Be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words.*

*Ezek. ii. 6.*

EZEKIEL'S lot was cast in difficult times. His people, to whom he was sent, whether by the Chebar in captivity, or still lingering around their doomed mother-city, were as briers, thorns, and scorpions. Embittered by their many sorrows; convicted by conscience of their guilt before God; compelled to trace a close connection between their sins and their punishment—it was inevitable that they would turn with peculiar dislike on any one who dared, like Ezekiel, to be an incarnate conscience to them, reminding them of their evil ways, remonstrating, exhorting, pleading.

Many readers of these words are in similar circumstances. Missionaries who are obliged to rebuke, not only the sins of the ungodly, but the inconsistencies of their own converts; ministers at home on whom the burden rests of protesting against popular and fashionable iniquity, or addressing stern words of rebuke to influential but worldly members of their churches; even young clerks or working-men whose life is thrown among the godless and profane, and who seem called upon to lodge their solemn warning against words and ways that are not good. Providing these enter their protest lovingly and tenderly, with no thought of their superiority, with no mere desire to wound and annoy, but to warn the sinner and to uphold the claims of Christ—their mission is a very salutary and necessary one. But it is sure to bring on them a storm of dislike.

At such times there is nothing for us but to abide in the presence of our Master Christ, weeping for the sins we rebuke, interceding for those who revile. Not fearful nor afraid, nor flinching from our duty, but ever hearing His sweet reassuring voice.

*Eat this roll, and go speak.*

*Ezek. iii. 1.*

TO each of us a Hand is put forth; and therein is the roll of the Book. We must feed on it for ourselves. We must find God's words and eat them; they must be the joy and rejoicing of our hearts. It is specially incumbent on those who have to go forth and speak, to open their mouths and eat the roll. There is no greater mistake than to suppose that, because we are constantly handling God's Word for the purpose of teaching and exhorting others, we are therefore feeding on it for ourselves. It is possible to acquire an intellectual knowledge of the truth, while the heart is entirely unaffected. But how far removed is this from that spiritual consideration of God's Word, by virtue of which it yields up its spiritual nutriment to our growth in the Divine life.

Sometimes the message we must acquire and give is, like this roll, written within and without with lamentations, and mourning, and woe. It can hardly be otherwise, when we are called to speak to people who are of a hard forehead and a stiff heart. It is very sweet to receive God's messages; but it is bitter to have to deliver them when they proclaim, as they must, the inevitable and disastrous results of sin. Oh that we may not shrink to declare the whole counsel of God, whether rebellious men will hear or forbear. Perhaps there has not been enough of this element in our preaching. All sunshine, the Arabs say, makes the desert. The harvest will fail unless the frost of winter has thoroughly broken up the clods. But whenever we dwell on the sterner aspects of God's truth it must be with bitter tears. "I tell you, even *weeping*," the apostle said, "that they are enemies of the Cross of Christ."

*Then said I, Ah, Lord God !*

*Ezek. iv. 14.*

THE prophet was bidden, in a series of striking and significant actions, to show the people the impending fate of their nation and city. Amongst other injunctions there was one so abhorrent to his soul that he craved its mitigation. "Ah, Lord God !" he said, "spare me from this." And God was entreated, and reduced the pressure of the burden proposed to be laid on His servant.

May not the counterpart of this happen in our own experience? We may be feeling that certain trials are insupportable, or certain demands beyond our power to meet. At such hours of bitter anguish it is quite permissible for us to go into the secret place of the Most High and gasp out our complaint, saying, "Ah, Lord God !" God invites us to speak freely with Him thus, and sends gracious mitigations of our griefs. "Ah, Lord God," we say, "let this cup pass from me": and, lo! an angel is sent to strengthen us. "Ah, Lord God," we cry, "this cross is too heavy; this thorn in the flesh too sharp; this diet too nauseous": and immediately there is some response of greater grace or lightened burden.

Oh, suffering child of God, get alone with Him, and talk freely. Do not hesitate to tell Him all that is in thine heart. Remember that Jesus said that the Father Himself loves us. We may go to that Father-heart, confiding to it how much we are suffering, not for ourselves only, but for their sakes who are dearer to us than life. Oh that they were happy, satisfied, safe! Has the duty become lately more than ever difficult? Has the smart become like a cancer with its venom? Take it to God! It is a sublime moment when the soul dares to plead its cause with God, saying, "Ah, Lord God !"



*I will do in thee that which I have not done.*  
*Ezek. v. 9.*

IT is an awful thing when those who have sinned against conspicuous privilege and opportunity come under the rod. Their punishment is infinitely heavier than that of such as have never known. The servant that knows his Lord's will, and does it not, is condemned to be beaten with many stripes. It was because Capernaum had been exalted to heaven that she was cast down to Hades. If an archangel falls, it must be to hell.

The child of God, like Israel, is set in the midst of the nations to testify to pure and undefiled religion; but if he rebels against God's judgments and statutes in doing wickedly, his chastisement is necessarily in proportion to the eminence of his former privileges. God cannot afford to deal lightly with the sin of His own people. Were He to do so, He might be accused of partiality, and they might presume. Well may the author of "Imitation" say, "Esteem not thyself better than others, lest perhaps in the sight of God, who knoweth what is in man, thou be accounted worse than they."

It becomes us to search our hearts to see if we are rejecting any of God's judgments, and refusing to walk in His will, or defiling His sanctuary with detestable things. A small black spot on a white ground is more noticeable than a larger one on a dark ground. A slight inconsistency in His child may lead to very heavy chastisements on the part of the Father in heaven. The nearer a pupil reaches toward perfection, the sterner is his master's discipline. Judgment begins at the house of God. If thou wert not capable of a rich fruitage, He would not take such pains with thee. Humble thyself under His mighty hand: He will exalt thee in due time.



*I have been broken with their whorish heart.  
And they shall loathe themselves.*

*Ezek. vi. 9 (R. V.).*

WE never realize what sin is till its passion is over, and we have time quietly to remember. Oh, the terror of those hours of remembrance and remorse! Sitting in the captivity of its prison, or serving in the heavy bondage of its fetters, the soul has time to review the bitter path by which it has come to such a pass, and the way it has broken the hearts of those who loved and trusted. But the most terrible element in remorse will be the personal one: "Shall remember Me."

One of our great writers depicts a heartless, thoughtless husband standing beside the newly covered-in grave of his wife, and saying, "Ah, Milly, Milly; dost thou hear me? I was not tender enough to thee; but it is too late to alter it now." The wife who has broken away from her husband, bringing desolation on a once happy home, and heart-break on the one she really loved, will have her time of remorse when she remembers him, and how he was broken by her sin. And she will loathe herself. The child who has given way to fits of ungovernable passion, which have broken up the home, and brought down grey hairs with sorrow to the grave, will loathe itself. Similarly, as we review our past life, and see how we must have grieved the tender Spirit of God, we fall at the feet of Jesus and cover them with tears and kisses.

What a marvellous word is this! "I have been broken." Our sin can give God the heart-break, because He loves us so. Indeed, on the Cross the Lord died of a broken heart; of this the issuing stream of blood and water was the sign. O heart of stone, thou too must break and loathe thyself, when thou seest thy Lord broken by thy sin!

*Their silver and their gold . . . shall not satisfy their souls.*

*Ezek. vii. 19.*

THIS chapter is full of alarms ! An end : the end is come ! (ver. 2). An evil, an only evil : behold it cometh. An end is come ; the end is come (vers. 5, 6). The time is come ; the day is near (ver. 7). Behold the day, behold it cometh ; thy doom is gone forth (ver. 10). The time is come (ver. 12). At such a crisis, what can silver and gold do ? Let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn. None shall return. The sword is without ; pestilence and famine within.

Generally silver and gold stand for much among the children of men ; they are the keys to the unlocking of the treasures of life. But when the supreme crises come ; when all hands are feeble, and all knees weak as water ; when the day of the wrath of the Lord breaks—there is no help in silver and gold ; they cannot satisfy or save.

Men forget that they are destined for immortality ; and that God hath set Eternity in their hearts. How utterly impotent gold and silver, the things of earth, the abundance of goods which a man may store in his barn, to appease the conscience, or arrest the remorseless hunger of the soul for peace and purity and satisfaction ! He is the happiest who is largely independent of these things, and lives a pilgrim life, reckoning that his enduring city is with God, whose treasures are heavenly and incorruptible. It is a great misfortune that professing Christians have failed to realize this. Too many of them are as eager to maintain and extend their establishments, as though life consisted in the abundance of what they possess. So missionary causes dwindle for want of funds ; children are drawn into worldly alliances ; and worldlings depreciate our holy religion.

WHAT disclosures were these ! In the entry to the Temple court stood the great idol, here described as an image of jealousy ; because, speaking after the manner of men, it greatly provoked the Eternal Spouse of Israel ! The seventy elders engaged in worshipping every form of creeping things and abominable beasts, portrayed on the walls of the secret chambers ! The women weeping for Tammuz, whose yearly death and resurrection were celebrated with licentious orgies ! The five-and-twenty men with their backs toward the Temple ! Is it to be wondered at that God could not spare, nor have pity ?

But are there no chambers of imagery in our natures, which were meant to be the sanctuary of the eternal ? Is it quite certain that evil thoughts and imaginations have not imprinted themselves on the walls of the heart ? Ah, it may be so. What seems fair and beautiful in the eye of man may be concealing terrible secrets, open only to that of God. In the secret of our hearts, we permit unclean birds to brood ; in the darkness of our soul, wild thoughts wander at will. What need there is to adopt the venerable and touching words : “Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love Thee.”

There is deliverance from all this, by the grace and through the blood of the Lord Jesus. He can save and keep. He can so fill the soul with His presence that sin shall be utterly abhorrent. We may become so sensitive to the least approach of evil as to shelter ourselves in Him, before the first symptom of temptation shall have gained force and volume for its attack. Holy Spirit, keep Thine own temple, we pray Thee !

*Come not near any man upon whom is the mark ;  
and begin at my sanctuary.* *Ezek. ix. 6.*

ALL these visions were given, as we learn from the first chapter, as Ezekiel was with the earlier groups of Hebrew captives in Babylon. His thoughts were greatly engrossed by what was transpiring in the beloved city among the remnant still residing there. The six men represented judgments yet impending, in the man clothed in linen with the unknown, the discriminating righteousness of God's judgments.

Judgment begins with the house of God ; with those of us who are called to teach and preach, and bear office in the Church. The six men who had the slaughter-weapons began at the elders, described in the previous chapter, who were before the house. If any such are living in sin, God's judgment must fall first and more heavily on them, because they know better and profess more than others. But let it be remembered always that repentance and the putting away of sin will always avert the sword. "If thou wilt put away thine abominations, then thou shalt not remove."

Amid scenes of judgment, whether in the Church or the world, there is always a remnant, upon whom is the mark ; on Lot in Sodom ; on Israel amid the plagues of Egypt ; on Rahab in the fall of Jericho ; on the 144,000 at the Great Tribulation. They are safe amid the fiery indignation which devours the adversaries. Have we been touched by the blood, sealed by the Spirit, and branded with the mark of the brand of Jesus? Without doubt we have, if we know what it is to sigh and cry for the abominations that are wrought around us, and of which our own nature is capable, except for the grace of God. These are the signs which indicate the humbling, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

*The glory of the Lord went forth from over the threshold, and stood over the cherubim.*

*Ezek. x. 18.*

THE gradual withdrawal of God from His house is described in vivid and awful minuteness. In ix. 3, it had gone to the threshold ; x. 4, it had mounted up ; 15, the cherubim mounted up ; xi. 23, it passes from the city. It is well worth our while to ponder this deep and searching lesson. The light of other days fades but slowly : the year sinks by almost insensible gradations to the fall of the leaf ; grey hairs besprinkle our heads without our knowing it ; before ever we are aware of it, the train has borne us miles off the main line to the wrong station. So gradually our hearts may backslide. Satan is too knowing to lead us at a single leap into the precipice, but conducts us by a gradual incline. A little less Bible reading ; a slight slackening in watchfulness and prayer ; an imperceptible drift worldwards.

But turn to xliii. 2-4. The glory of the Lord returned to the renovated temple. Like the dawn of a new day ; like the sound of many waters, it came, it came. " This," God said, " is the place of My throne ; . . . and the house of Israel shall no more defile." Ah, backslider, God will come back to thee again. Thy repentance may be most inadequate ; but if it be genuine, if thou dost truly turn to Him from thy sin, thy heart shall again become irradiate with His most blessed of holy light.

Without forcing, these words are also applicable to that coming for which we wait and long ; when He who ascended shall descend again to be in us and with us forever :

" Hark ! what a sound, and too divine for hearing,  
Stirs on the earth and trembles in the air !  
It is the thunder of the Lord's appearing !  
It is the music of His peoples' prayer !"

*Yet will I be to them a little sanctuary in the countries before they are come. Ezek. xi. 16.*

AWAY from the outward ordinances and the material edifice, the exiles would find more than the equivalent in God Himself. He would give them the reality, of which there had been the outward and visible emblems. Amid all their justly-deserved sufferings they would find a deep fountain of spiritual blessing and comfort in God's presence.

*To those who are deprived of the means of grace.*—Sufferers in sick rooms, travellers in lonely and distant places, missionaries amongst the heathen. How often to such comes the vision of the country church, when the summer air stole into the open window, bringing the breath of flowers; or of the great City church, with the well-known voice of a beloved minister. They long for these again. But God will be all and more.

*To those who cannot derive benefit from the services they attend.*—The clergyman is Ritualistic, or the Free-church minister is broad in his views, and unsympathetic with the deeper moods of the spirit. Still, it may be your duty to attend for example's sake; but whilst waiting before the Lord, He will draw near and become your sanctuary.

*To those who are exposed to danger and persecution.*—In the olden time the sanctuary was a place of refuge. All who fled thither were in safeguard. So, let the driven soul haste to the folds of the Tabernacle of God's presence. None can pursue it into that secret place. No weapon shall smite; and even envying voices shall die into subdued murmurs.

He that eateth the living bread—that confesseth Jesus to be the Christ—that keepeth His commandments—and that lives in love—dwells in God as his sanctuary, while God dwells in him as His.



*The word that I shall speak shall be performed : it shall be no more deferred.*      *Ezek. xii. 25, 28.*

IN various ways the people of Israel were endeavoring to minimize the effects of Ezekiel's denunciations of judgment. They did not deny that he spoke the word of God ; but comforted themselves with the reflection that it was not likely to be fulfilled for some time yet. "The vision that he seeth is for many days to come." God, on the other hand, said, "It shall be no more deferred."

We are all disposed to remove the wonder-working of God to the remote past or the distant future : either that He did miracles or will do them. Heaven touches the earth at this horizon or that ; but it is remote from the place where we stand. This is the tendency of our mind ; and for this reason we miss the manifestations of God's grace and power, which wait to enrich our lives. Now is the accepted time ; now the day of salvation. As Christ is, so are we. There is as much of Divine power and love throbbing around, and within our easy reach, as ever filled the upper room at Pentecost, or shall break on the world in the millennial days. Let us not postpone our appropriation of it. Let us never permit the thought that God is not prepared to fulfill His promises here and now. Let us not lament over the past as having been better than the present can ever be expected to be, nor predict greater days for our children.

It is here that the distinction between fact, faith, and feeling, will help us. We very seldom, indeed, never until Spirit-taught, put these three in their right order. We try to *feel* that spiritual facts are so, instead of accepting that *they are*, and daring to act as if they were patent to physical sensations. A spiritual fact is true, even when you do not believe or feel it. Believe ! act ! and you will come to feel.



*Prophesy against the prophets of Israel . . . that prophesy out of their own hearts. Ezek. xiii. 2.*

IT is a great temptation to those of us who are often called to speak for God, to prophesy out of our own heart, to follow our own spirit, and to profess to see what we have not seen. We are apt to say, "The Lord saith," when the Lord hath not sent us. These words of ours always tend toward soothing and pacifying guilty consciences with assurances of peace, peace. You may always tell when a man is speaking from the vanity of his own heart. He glozes over sin, and speaks with bated breath of its consequences.

This is what the Word of God describes as daubing a slight wall with untempered mortar, and sewing pillows on elbows for handfuls of barley and pieces of bread. The daubing makes the wall look as strong as possible, but it cannot save it from collapsing before the overflowing shower of God's judgment and the great hailstones of His wrath. The pillows may save the flesh from chafing, but cannot avert the blows of a broken law. Oh, take care, lest ye give men license to sin, by the slight views ye circulate of its nature or penalty. Are not these lying divinations? Do they not grieve the heart of the righteous, and strengthen the hands of the wicked? Take care lest the fate of the daubing be the fate also of the false prophets: "The wall is no more; neither they that daubed it."

It is not an easy thing to speak to the prophets. But how necessary that there should be a Prophet to prophets: for these get into the way of supposing that they must be right, whose least word is so revered by their people. "You are very fond of preaching," said Dr. Andrew Bonar to one to whom he had been listening. "Yes, doctor; very." "But are you as fond of lost souls?"

*Ye shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem. Ezek. xiv. 22.*

THE sin of Jerusalem was so heinous that God was constrained to send on her His four sore judgments all at once and together. Each alone was so terrible that Noah, Daniel, and Job, had they been living, would only have succeeded in saving their own souls; but how much more when they befell the land unitedly! But, Jehovah says, ye shall come to know, when you review My work from the vantage-ground of the years, that I have not done without cause (or in vain, *marg.*) all that I have done (ver. 23). Ye shall be comforted, when a remnant of sons and daughters escapes, who see and acknowledge their sinful ways and deeds.

Those words deserve to be carefully pondered. They seem to contain the very essence of God's thoughts in His dealings with us during the present age. "Ye shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done" (ver. 23). We do not know the cause of so much that crushes us to the ground. But if we did know it as well as we shall know it some day, we should have no difficulty in reconciling God's dealings with His perfect love.

Yes, some day we shall be comforted! Comforted as to God's meaning in our sorrows and trials! Comforted as to His dealings with our dear ones! Comforted about His government of the whole universe, of which the world is part! We shall see that there was a cause or reason for all God's stern discipline. We shall admit that it was wisely adapted to its end, and achieved it. We are too prone to judge God hastily and superficially, instead of waiting to see the "end of the Lord," when all His reasons and purposes will be explained from the great white throne (see Rev. xv. 3).

*What is the vine tree more than any tree?*

*Ezek. xv. 2.*

WHAT is the vine good for? Will it bear comparison with the trees of the forest? Do men make chairs, tables, house-roofs out of it! No, they will not make even a pin for hanging vessels on, out of the vine-wood. There is only one use for the vine—to bear fruit. If it fails to do that, it may as well be cast at once to the flames. Then it is still more useless; and as we gather the charred pieces together, we realize that they are hardly worth our care.

So with believers. Like Israel, they are God's vine, created in Christ Jesus unto fruit-bearing. The one purpose and end of their redemption and salvation is that they should bring forth fruit unto God; and if they fail in this, after having been pruned and enriched in every way, they are cast forth as worthless and unprofitable, and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. Savorless salt is good for nothing: fruitless vines are utterly useless: professors who bear no fruit are worse than useless, they cumber the ground. Let us abide in Christ, that He may bear fruit through us. Let us be willing for all the pruning and discipline which God is pleased to send us, that we may bring forth more fruit; but let it ever be borne in mind that fruitfulness does not always mean activity, but the bearing of the sweet fruits of the Spirit, which consist largely in temper and disposition.

Apart from Christ, how helpless and worthless we are! Let us often, and particularly when tempted to vanity, conceit, self-sufficiency, self-satisfaction, remember that we are only vine-branches, of no intrinsic worth, and only useful when the sap of the vine is passing through us. "What hast thou, that thou didst not receive?" (1 Cor. iv. 7).

*It was perfect through My comeliness, which I  
had put upon thee.*

*Ezek. xvi. 14.*

HOW rich this chapter is in spiritual significance for ourselves! We, too, were born in the land of the Canaanite—our father the first Adam; our mother Eve. There was no beauty in us by nature, but everything to cause abhorrence to the Holy God. And if we are washed and clothed, decked with gold and silver, arrayed in fine linen, silk, and embroidered work, eating fine flour, and honey, and oil, exceedingly beautiful and arrayed in royal estate, it is all of grace—of the exceeding and eternal grace of God. There is nothing of it at all in which we can boast ourselves. Of Him are we in Christ Jesus, through whom we are what we are. We are perfect only through His comeliness which He has put upon us.

First, let us dare to believe that it is so. Accept and value your position. In Christ, we are more than tolerated; we are loved. We are more than forgiven; we are arrayed in fair garments. The King greatly delights in us. In His eyes, and because His beauty is upon us, we are all fair. The joy that the Father has in Jesus, He has in us who are in Him. We may be deeply conscious of our sinnership; but He doth not behold iniquity in Jacob, nor see perverseness in Israel. We need not shrink to take our place even among the holy ones of the Presence-chamber, because we are accepted in the Beloved, and clad in His comeliness.

But, next, let us not presume. We have nought of our own. When the temptation tries us to pride ourselves on our goodness; to arrogate to ourselves a special position because of our superiority to others; to assume that we can be independent of our immortal Lover—then let us remember what we were.

*All fowl of every wing.*

*Ezek. xvii. 23.*

THE cedar is a royal tree. It thrives 6,000 feet above the level of the sea. The concentric rings of one tree showed that it was 3,500 years old. What a contrast between the long-lived, deep-rooted, broad-branched tree, and the little birds that nest among the leaves !

The text suggests that Christ is the cedar, and all kinds of people seek rest in Him, as birds of every wing. Young and old, rich and poor ; men high-soaring as the eagle, fierce as the raven, gentle as the dove. The young, just learning to try their wings ; the old, weary, and lonely ; those who have kept all the commandments from their youth, and those who have broken them all.

It does not matter with what wing we come to Jesus, so long as we come. The practiced eye can easily recognize the birds by their flight ; each bird has its own wing ; so every soul has its own disposition and temperament—one feverish, the other languid and lethargic ; one impetuous, the other dilatory ; one affectionate and warm, the other cool and shy. But the Lord Jesus knows our frame, and understands us afar off. He does not chide the dove because it cannot breast the storm and face the sun like the eagle. He does not expect the sustained flight of the seagull from the sparrow ; or the song of the nightingale from the chaffinch.

Do not imitate another ; be yourself. Do not go about the world counting that you are useless and a failure, because you cannot do what is done by others. Learn how to be abased, and how to abound. Only rest in Christ. Out of the windy storm and tempest, make for your roosting-place under the shelter of His wing.

*Behold, all souls are Mine.*

*Ezek. xviii. 4.*

THIS is bed-rock. Let us ever get down to the beginnings of things, when we state God's claims on men. Instead of only pleading with them, let us boldly assert God's claims upon them. All souls are His: of the African as of the European; of the heathen as well as of the Christian born; of the toiling, sorrowing, sinning, as of those that stand in the sunlit circle.

His by right of *creation*. "He made us, and we are His." Has not a man a claim on all that his hands have made? and has God less? His by right of *redemption*. To any man we have the privilege of saying, "You have been purchased by the precious blood of Christ." His by the right of *His own holy and glorious Nature*. Not to own Him and love Him supremely is a gross violation of the eternal fitness of things. The parent has a claim on his child.

Needest thou fear anything, fellow Christian, since thou art His? Though thou goest forth alone into the wilderness, where there seems no spring, no food; though thou hast no visible means of sustenance through no fault of thine; though thou shalt be called to pass to-day out of this world into the unseen: since thou art God's, is He not responsible for thee? Will an owner allow his house to fall out of repair, or his beasts to lack food and tendance? Will God not tend, maintain, nurture, and cherish thee? Would it not be to His discredit if He were careless of thee, His own? The fact of thy bearing His mark and stamp upon thee is guarantee enough of His obligation to be a God to thee. Let Him do with us as He please. Surely we can perfectly trust Him; He is well within His rights.



*This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation.*

*Ezek. xix. 1 and 14.*

THIS chapter is a dirge ; first over two kings of the house of David, Jehoahaz and Jehoiachim, who, like wild beasts, had been carried off, the former to Egypt, the latter by the Chaldeans ; and then over the whole royal family, described under the figure of a wasted vine, humbled and almost destroyed.

We, too, may lament for the sufferings and sorrows of our King. The Holy Spirit would not have us forget them ; because our sin-laden and wounded hearts can only become healed by pressing against His wounds who was pierced by the nails and the spear. “ Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself ”—the agony and bloody sweat ; the cross and passion ; the scorn and reviling ; the contradiction of sinners ; and the malice of Satan. And as the full measure of His sufferings is unfolded to us we shall weep and lament ; not for Him, but for ourselves and for our children.

That our sins nailed Him to the cross ; that our guilt extorted from His heart the cry that He was forsaken ; that His prolonged agony was borne in our stead, and borne for nothing else than for love of us ; that we have grieved Him so, torn open His wounds, and added to His pains, by our rebellion and ingratitude ; that the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and that we have been healed only by His stripes. Here is subject for lamentation indeed !

But it is strange that the remembrance of all this brings strength, and solace, and peace. As Bunyan says, “ He hath given us rest by His sorrow.” The bitterness of His sorrows alternately makes us sad and blessed. Sad that we brought Him such a heritage of woe : happy that since He has suffered, we are forever emancipated from what had crushed us.



*We will be as the nations, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone.*

*Ezek. xx. 32 (R. V.).*

THERE was a tendency among the chosen people to reason thus: Why should we be perpetually reminded of the claims of Jehovah? Why should we not do as we please? Why not do as other nations around, who select their own deities, and do not seem to suffer as we do? Nay, said the Most High, that cannot be. When once I have entered into covenant relations with any, they cannot lightly cast off those sacred bonds. My name and character are too deeply implicated. I must work for my holy Name's sake, that it may not be polluted (vers. 9, 14, 22).

It is a very solemn thing to have become God's children. Sin is not the same in us as in others. In those it may be slightly passed over, but in us it will be visited with many stripes. We cannot sin with impunity, nor do as we list. As far as we go into sin, we shall have to come out of it. The more pleasure we may have had in forbidden paths, the more sharp the anguish through which we shall have to retrace our steps. We cannot be as the nations. We cannot serve wood and stone. We cannot go our own way.

But the thought cuts in two directions; if we are bound to God, He is also bound to us. We *may not* leave Him, but He *CANNOT* leave us! He will always be mindful of His covenant. There is one plea with God that never fails: "Do it for Thy great Name's sake." He cannot deny Himself, or allow His honor to be trampled in the mud.

"Yes—howsoe'er I stray and range,  
Whate'er I do, Thou dost not change;  
I steadier step, when I recall  
That, if I slip, Thou dost not fall."

*It shall be no more, until He come whose right it is ; and I will give it Him.                      Ezek. xxi. 27.*

THIS prophecy was directed against Zedekiah and Jerusalem ; and predicts the advance of Nebuchadnezzar, who is represented as considering an expedition against them and Ammon. Whatever the king of Judah thought to establish by his wit and power, God would overthrow. Nothing should stand, however carefully constructed, till the Messiah came to take up the kingdom and rule with meekness and righteousness.

I will overturn, overturn, overturn. Our King is always engaged in destruction, that He may the better occupy Himself with construction. He overthrows our cities of brick that He may build them of marble. He removes the things that can be shaken, as things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. He destroyed the institutions of the Old Covenant, that He might substitute the New. This is the inner meaning of the earthquake that so often casts down our lofty towers.

That fortune which you had built up with so much care was overturned, that you might acquire the true riches. That reputation which you had established for integrity and self-restraint was overturned, that you might despair of yourself and avail yourself of the provision made for sinners in Jesus. That friendship was overturned, that you might come to the love of God.

“ He took the silver and the gold,  
    To make me rich in grace ;  
He quenched earth’s lights that I might see  
    The shining of His Face.”

And God will go on with this overturning work until every high thing that exalts itself against the Lord Jesus is thrown down, and He is enthroned.

*I will consume thy filthiness out of thee.*

*Ezek. xxii. 15.*

THE idea here, and in the following paragraph, is of the smelting furnace. *We are refined by fire.* Fire is pain. It is the symbol of all that our nature shrinks from. But affliction is all this. It may be anxiety about money-matters; or the chronic ill-temper of some member of your family; or a random word; or a telegraphic message; or a whispered secret; or anxiety about your health: but your soul is filled with fire—keen, strong, alive, devouring. Do not wonder at this; for only so can you be delivered from your dross and filth.

*But God appoints it.* As much as the process of refining implies the presence of the refiner, the afflictions of the believer imply the presence and purpose of the Lord. The process could not be carried on without Him. We are sure that in every sick chamber, where His servant lies, besides the attendant wife or nurse, sits the Great Refiner of silver; closer than close; nearer than near; tenderer than the tenderest. You may not see Him now; but some day when you look back on your present sufferings, you will understand, and say: "I could not have lived through it had not the Master been with me."

*The trial is a sign of preciousness.* You do not cast a stone into the crucible, or winnow chaff, or prune a bramble, or put a cinder in the lap-dog's meal. So, when Jesus subjects us to trial, it is only because, amid all our dross, His keen eye detects the precious gold which cost Him Calvary, and is capable of becoming His ornament of beauty forever.

"Through the test of sharp distresses,  
Those whom Heaven most richly blesses,  
For its joys are purified."

*I will raise up thy lovers against thee, and bring them against thee on every side.*

*Ezek. xxiii. 22.*

IT is one sign of the revolution that the teaching of Jesus has made, that the imagery of this chapter is foreign to our modes of thought.

Spiritual unfaithfulness is constantly described under metaphors borrowed from the marriage relationship. If the soul wanders from God, He is depicted as the husband in whose heart the fire of jealousy burns; while the soul is compared to a truant wife. In the text quoted above, the analogy is followed still further; and the prophet asserts that it is impossible for us to be always satisfied with the lovers that we have chosen, and that our chastisement for wandering will probably come through their agency.

There is no lack of practical illustration of this. If a Christian choose worldly prosperity, or his own reputation, or any earthly object apart from God, it is through this that he will suffer. The things that he has loved will be raised up against him, just as Israel, that had dallied with Babylon, was carried into captivity to Babylon. Of sinful and forbidden pleasure God will make whips of scorpions by which to drive us back to Himself.

What a light, by force of contrast, is cast on those rapturous words of the apostle, when he tells us that we may be married to that glorious Man, even to Him that was raised from the dead! The soul stands by to see Him die, bathed in tears; but as she beholds Him rise, she is divinely attracted to Him, conscious of a profound affinity, which engrosses and absorbs her being. Nothing will satisfy her then but union with His Spirit. She reckons herself dead to all the old lovers, through the body of Christ, but forever alive unto Him.

*So I spake unto the people in the morning : and  
at even my wife died.* *Ezek. xxiv. 18.*

IT was a sudden stroke which befell the prophet's home. In the morning the desire of his eyes was present to care for him, and in the even she had passed away. It is the practice of the Eastern mourner to give vent to heart-rending cries ; in his case these were forbidden. He might sigh, but not aloud (R. v.). There was to be no mourning for the dead ; neither tears, nor fasting ; because his work was to engross him ; the needs of the people preponderated over personal anguish ; and he was called to set forth in his own reticence the solemn, tearless anguish with which Israel would go into captivity.

We are reminded of the words of the apostle in 1 Cor. vii., that those who had wives should be as though they had none ; those that wept as though they wept not ; because the time was short, and the fashion of the world was passing away.

In every human experience there are times when the personal must be subordinated to the national and universal. We must choke back our sobs, crush down our almost uncontrollable emotion, preserve a calm and tranquil exterior, that we may devote ourselves more earnestly and continuously to the crying need of others. There is nothing nobler than the self-restraint which anoints the head and washes the face, that it may have leisure from itself to do its life-work, and to press to its bosom those who are suffering around. There was a pretty illustration of this in a recent railway accident, when a little girl, badly hurt, insisted on being cared for last.

“ Yet not in solitude ! if Christ anear me  
Waketh Him workers for the great employ !  
Oh, not in solitude ! if souls that hear me  
Catch from my joyance the surprise of joy.”

*Because Moab and Seir say, Judah is like unto all the nations, therefore behold. . . .*

*Ezek. xxv. 8, 9.*

IT is a remarkable fact that the Hebrew prophets were such keen politicians in the best sense. They were always watching and interpreting the dealings of God in contemporary history. Mention of Moab and Seir is almost as frequent as of Jerusalem. I remember the saintly Professor Reynolds saying, as he opened the morning paper, "Let us see what our heavenly Father is doing in the world."

As our enemies behold the children of God, they are apt to suppose that there is no difference between them and others. They cannot see the Divine environment within which they live, and they suppose that they can easily work their will. They say, Behold these people are like other people; we have but to stretch out our hand, and can spoil them as a boy the nests of spring. Then they discover that they have another to reckon with, and that God will arise to plead the cause of His people and to execute judgment upon their oppressors. Not in vain did He say to Abraham, and through him to all that believe: "I will bless him that blesseth thee, and curse him that curseth thee": "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper."

We must not presume on this. Strong as God is on our behalf toward our enemies, He is equally so within the circle of His household. He will not let others hurt us, but He will not spare His children. He may use others as His rod, just as at certain epochs of their national history He used Moab or Edom. But when the work of refining is done, He will lay the instruments aside, and even punish, if there has been an excess of malice. O child of God, thy privilege and responsibility are immeasurable. Thou art not as others.



*Though thou be sought for, yet shalt thou never be found again, saith the Lord God.*

*Ezek. xxvi. 21.*

TYRE, to the world of her age, was what Venice was in the Middle Ages, and London to-day. She was strong in the sea; the carrying trade of the world was in her hands. Carthage, which was able to conflict with Rome, was her daughter; and the coasts of Cornwall were visited by her merchant vessels. In the days of Ezekiel she was a proud and populous city. But the prophet predicted her approaching fall. Her songs would cease; her walls would be overwhelmed in the floods of armed men; and the rocks on which she stood would be as bare as before a fisherman's hut was built on them. And as the prophet anticipates the future, he says that her site would be sought in vain; a prediction so literally fulfilled that it is only of late years that careful research has been able to pronounce where Tyre stood.

This chapter seems to underlie the description given in the Apocalypse of the Fall of Babylon, when the mighty angel shall take up a stone, like a great mill-stone, and cast it into the sea; when all human voices shall cease from her vast solitudes, and the grinding of the mill-stone shall be forever silent. So shall perish every false system; all mere traditionalism and ritualism; all that savors of human pride; all the blandishments and impurities of the unfaithful Church, which sought to turn men's hearts from God.

What a contrast to this are the words of Jeremiah (l. 20): "In those days the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found." Refuse the love of God, and you are doomed; you will leave no enduring record. Trust in Him, and your sins will be blotted out as if they had never been.



*The east wind hath broken thee in the heart of the seas.*  
*Ezek. xxvii. 26 (R. V.).*

IN this splendid chapter the prophet describes Tyre under the image of one of her own merchant vessels. Looking at it simply as a piece of composition, what an extreme interest there is in this enumeration of the various races which were subject to this mighty city, and the lands from which she drew her supplies ! We are reminded of the far-spreading colonies of the Anglo-Saxon race. We can almost hear the noise of her construction in the earlier verses, and see fine linen hoisted as her sail, whilst she is manned and piloted by her statesmen. Heavily laden with the choice merchandise of the East, she sails the seas, independent of the winds of heaven, because the galley slaves toil at treble banks of oars on either side. But their rowing brings her into great waters ; she encounters the east wind, which breaks her in the heart of the sea ; and in one day, pilots, rowers, men of war, and merchandise, are lost—all brought to silence in the midst of the sea. What a powerful conception of the great ship sinking in silence with all on board ! One cry ; the waves meet over her ; and only a floating spar tells where she sank.

So it is with many a life. The whole world is laid under contribution for its outfit. Bashan, Chittim, Egypt, bring their quota ; and to all appearance, as it glides from its stocks upon the sea of life, a fair voyage awaits it, and large exchange of the wares of human industry and thought. But where Christ is not the Pilot, and His Word not the chart, the rowers bring it into great waters, and it is broken by the east wind. O mariner ! see to it that Christ is on board ; for He only can still the tempest and speak peace, and guide thee out of the great waters.

*Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty.*

*Ezek. xxviii. 12.*

THE magnificent words of this chapter cannot be applicable merely to Tyre. Behind that mighty city the prophet beheld its Prince, the anointed cherub that covereth (ver. 14); and on further investigation this can only be the prince of the power of the air, who, our Lord says, is also the prince of this world. When he was created he was perfect in his ways, till unrighteousness was found in him (ver. 15). But he was cast out of heaven, when his heart was lifted up (ver. 17). He said, I am God; but as he met in conflict the Son of Man, he learned his absolute inferiority.

This association of a comity with an evil spirit is not confined to this chapter only. It is a frequent allusion of the Scriptures. For instance, Daniel describes the Prince of Persia as hindering the advent of Gabriel to succor the chosen people: whilst the apostle Paul distinctly attributes the darkness of the world to the wicked spirits in the heavenlies. Without doubt, the same thought underlies the present magnificent apostrophe. And this is such an encouragement to prayer; because from our knees we may affect the balance of power in the heavenlies by the weight of our intercessions.

All through this chapter runs the contrast between the fallen cherub, the patron saint of Zidon, and Jehovah the God of Israel. In the collision between these two, the might of the devil was shown to be a shadow; and his votaries were ashamed and astonished at his impotence to defend them. For us there is blessed significance in this subject. Greater is He that is for us than he that is against us. The last Adam hath stood in the conflict in which the first Adam fell. None shall prevail against us in Him.

*I have given him the land of Egypt, . . . because they wrought for Me.*      *Ezek. xxix. 20 (R. V.).*

THE king of Babylon was sent against Tyre. The siege lasted long, and his army suffered great privations. Scorching heat above, and the heavy burdens on their shoulders, made every head bald and every shoulder pealed. For this great service he was to be recompensed with the gift of the land of Egypt, because he had wrought God's purpose.

The words quoted above suggest the thought, that though we do not merit anything of God by our service, yet He does not forget our work of faith and labor of love when it is wrought for Him. If He gave Egypt to a heathen king for his service in respect to Tyre, we may also expect Him to bestow a reward on those who have built gold, silver, and precious stones, into His holy temple. The servant who has made his five talents into ten, shall be rewarded with ten cites. Those who have watched and waited through the long night shall be rewarded with special honor in the bridal feast. God will give to us some guerdon for our toils, some prize for our conflict, some token of His favor, which will be all of grace and yet proportionate to the work wrought for Him.

The transference of countries from one sovereign power to another may appear to be only the result of political combinations, or superior armies. "Providence is on the side of the strongest battalions," Napoleon said; and the remark is consistent with man's ordinary way of thinking. But here the prophet withdraws the vail, and shows the fulfillment of the Divine purpose, as Egypt comes under the power of the king of Babylon. As we look over the world, how vast are the changes which are passing over it, preparing for Christ's gospel.

*When I shall put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon.*

*Ezek. xxx. 25.*

THE emphasis is on the word *my*. The punishment inflicted by the king of Babylon on Egypt was directly from God ; it was *His* sword in the hand of Nebuchadnezzar (ver. 10). How little the historian of that time realized that there was anything more in the expedition of Babylon against Egypt than the natural rivalry of these two great nations. But the eye of the inspired seer saw that Babylon was the executor of the Divine decree.

Very often events and people carry the sword of God, or His rod, which to the natural eye seem to emanate by chance, or by the malice of men. God's chastisements are very real. It is probable that no child of God sins knowingly against the Divine order without being chastised. Sometimes the natural consequences of our sins, at other times misfortunes in our circumstances, or the alienation of our friends, make the scourge of small cords by which our souls are taught the bitterness of any way but God's.

Are you undergoing chastisement? Do not regard the human agent with any feeling but of love and pity ; do not expend your strength in resistance and threatening ; do not faint when you are rebuked : but lie still at the feet of God, receiving meekly the strokes, and thankful that He loves you well enough to take such pains. Thus the bitter discipline will produce the fruits of righteousness which are to the praise and glory of God. Never forget to distinguish between chastisement and punishment. The one is for the child ; the other for the rebel. Chastisement we may bear ; but the punishment of our sin has been forever borne by Jesus Christ. Oh, do not call yourself *Marah* ! If you only understood God's way, it would be *Naomi*.

*They . . . that dwelt under His shadow in the midst of the heathen.* *Ezek. xxxi. 17.*

WHATEVER may be the primary meaning of these words, they have a very blessed application to those who have gone forth, from so many Christian families, into heathen lands. For no choice of their own, and simply in obedience to their King's command, hundreds of our sons and daughters have gone forth to dwell in the midst of the heathen. They have taken up their home amid conditions which they would not have chosen, had it not been for the constraining love of Christ, and the imperative need of dying men; and as fond relatives and friends regard their lot from a distance, they are often filled with anxious forebodings. May they not be involved in some sudden riot and sacrificed to a frenzy of hate? May not the sanitary conditions and methods of life be seriously detrimental to their health or morals? "Oh, if only I could be there," you sigh.

Hush! Christ is there; as near them as He is to you, casting over them the shadow of His Presence, beckoning them to His secret place. He is the shadow of a great Rock in a weary land; or like the canopy of cloud that hovered over the camp of Israel by day, screening it from the torrid glare. Do not fear to trust your loved ones to the immortal Lover, who fainteth not, neither is weary. The hand that would harm is arrested and paralyzed when it attempts to penetrate that safe enclosure.

"God is never so far off as even to be near :

He is within ! Our spirit is the home He holds most dear.  
To think of Him as by our side, is almost as untrue,  
As to remove His throne beyond those skies of starry blue ;  
So all the while I thought myself homeless, forlorn,  
and weary,

Nursing my joy, I walked the earth—myself God's  
sanctuary."

*The word of the Lord came unto me, saying :*

*Ezek. xxxii. 1, 17.*

WE often bring our words to God, without being equally eager to receive His to us. Probably His word often comes to us when we are too engaged to hear it, or because our ear is not anointed and purged. Tennyson used to boast of his power of detecting a bat's shrill scream, which comparatively few can catch. So it is not every child of God that can be still or quick enough to detect the whisper of His small soft voice. When it does come, breaking in through the many voices that fill heart and life, we do well, as Ezekiel did, carefully to mark the days as memorable, writing on the tablet of our heart, "On this day God spake to my soul."

We do well to observe special days in our diary of the years. The day of our conversation or consecration; the day of deliverance from overwhelming trouble; the day when He summoned us to some new duty; the day when Paradise shone around us with its golden sheen. Even Paul recorded, amid his busy life, that day when he was caught up into the third heaven.

Let us invite these Divine confidences. Let us fall on our face while God talks with us. Let us be on the outlook lest His invitations are not responded to. Let us address our heavenly Bridegroom in the words of the Song of Songs: "Let me hear Thy voice, for sweet is Thy voice." Then, though we sleep, our heart will wake; and we shall recognize the voice of our Beloved, as He waits at the door, saying, "Open to Me, My sister, My love, My undefiled." Ah, who shall fathom the confidences that are exchanged when the word of the Lord thus comes to us? But be sure that it will cease, directly we hear, but fail to obey. Humility and obedience are essential.



*Then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them.*

*Ezek. xxxiii. 33.*

THE people looked on Ezekiel's ministrations as a delightful diversion. They regarded him as one that had a pleasant voice, and could play well on an instrument, and gathered around him with apparent eagerness and devotion. With their mouth they were profuse in expressions of love and admiration ; but they had no idea of the weight and worth of his words. They looked only on the beauty of his expressions, without penetrating to the spiritual depth and meaning they contained. But when once his warnings had taken effect, and his predictions had been fulfilled, that would know that he had been something more than a sweet singer, and that there had been a prophet among them.

We do not realize the true worth of God's gifts till they are gone from us never to be recalled. That friendship was grateful and pleasing to the sense ; but we did not gauge the true worth of our friend. That opportunity of hearing God's word from the lips of an honored minister was frittered away in casual criticisms on his manners and gestures, instead of being employed for hearing God's word from His lips. That incident in our life touched us by its outward features only ; but we failed to receive the profound lesson it was intended to convey. Alas, so often when the prophet has gone, we realize what he was, and what we have missed !

Let us be more careful to look into the heart of the circumstances and people around us ; to ponder deeply the meaning of all that God puts into our lives ; to penetrate below the surface to the eternal and divine, which are not far beneath. The vail between us and the Eternal Presence-chamber is as thin and delicate as the walls of our hearts.



*I will feed My flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God.*      *Ezek. xxxiv. 15.*

It is perfectly impossible to make sheep lie down unless they are satisfied or free from alarm. When the flocks lie deep in the rich pasture lands, it is because they have eaten to the full, and are quiet from fear of evil. When, therefore, the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls promises that He will so deal with us as to cause us to lie down, He undertakes to fulfill in our life these two conditions.

The Lord Jesus brings us into a good pasture, and causes us to feed in a fat pasture upon the mountains of fellowship, transfiguration, and far-reaching vision. Listen as He cries, "Eat, yea, eat abundantly, O beloved." Our restlessness arises from our refusal to obey His loving invitation to come and dine. We do not read our Bibles enough, or feed on His flesh, or drink His blood. Let us look at Scripture as the green pastures; and as we open them let us ask Him to be our guide, and to show us where the food appropriate to our need is to be found.

The Lord Jesus does more. He makes with us a covenant of peace; and even if the evil beasts do not cease out of the land, He so assures us that we can dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. He intends that we should be safe in Immanuel's land; that the bonds of our yoke should be broken; and that we should be delivered out of the hands of those who serve themselves of us.

O child of God, be less dependent on people and circumstances! Deal more constantly at first hand with Jesus. Regard Him as your Shepherd; "He maketh to lie down." Rejoice that He the Lord your God is with you, and that the shadowing woods, the mighty mountains, and the stream-watered vales are equally beneath His power and care.

*Whereas the Lord was there.*

*Ezek. xxxv. 10.*

LISTEN to the plottings of Mount Seir, waiting until Nehuchadnezzar has dispossessed Israel of their land, and with the fixed intention of entering upon its inheritance. These two nations, says the foe, and these two countries shall be mine. The children of Israel are in captivity in Habor and Gozan; the children of Judah at Babylon. What is there to prevent my entering upon their lands? But Jehovah Shammah, the Lord, was in possession; He was there.

What inspiration this is! How often do our foes plot against us, supposing that we shall fall an easy prey, and that they can divide the spoils without let. But God is there. God is in the heart, holding for Himself that which He redeemed. God is in that bed-chamber of mortal anguish and of long waiting. God is in that home which appears besieged by every kind of misfortune. O foot of the foe, thou shalt not intrude! O might of the foe, thou shalt not prevail! God is in possession! Though there seems nothing to prevent the complete overrunning of the land, the mailed forces of the enemy shall break on the invisible bulwarks of the Divine presence.

Jehovah, Shammah! That hallows every spot, consecrates every act, invests the meanest believer with transcendent worth, is our buttress against attack, and our glory in the midst. For God to be in the soul is the secret of its holiness, of its persistence in the heavenly way, and of its ultimate triumph over all the power of the adversary. Be sure that He is willing to become all this for you also, O weakest and most helpless man! When the Stronger than the strong is in possession, how safe his goods!

*Ye shall shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit to My people.*

*Ezek. xxxvi. 8.*

VERY magnificent is this address to the mountains of Israel. At the moment the prophet spoke they were lying waste, and the people of Idumea were plotting to possess them; but this chapter reiterates the assurance that they should be tilled, sown, and possessed.

It seems to me as though these words may be addressed to desolate hearts that are suffering from heartrending grief. Whereas they were once full of mirth, they are now desolate and lonely. The light of their eyes has departed; the voice that made music is still; the presence that filled the home is gone. Is such your case? Behold, God will do better unto you than at your beginnings, and the old estates shall be apportioned and inherited. Bind this promise to your heart; the desolate land shall be tilled, and they shall say, This land that was desolate has become like the Garden of Eden, and the wastes are inhabited (vers. 34, 35). Do you think that you will never be glad again; that shadow will always lie athwart your path; and that desolation shall hold undisputed empire? It shall not be so. O desolate mountains, ye shall shoot forth your branches, and yield fruit; and it is near to come.

But before these promises can be realized, you must let your sorrow work to its full result in the purification and sanctification of your heart. Great trouble has been allowed to come that you might know the vanity and evil of your own heart, and be led to claim the promises of verses 25-29. They are exceeding great and precious. Note specially the words, "In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities, the wastes shall be builded, and the desolate land tilled" (vers. 33, 34).

*Prophecy over these bones. . . . Prophecy unto the wind.*

*Ezek. xxxvii. 4, 9 (R. V.).*

THIS is our double office, as servants of God. We are to prophecy to earth and heaven; to man and God. There are some who forget the second of these injunctions, and their work fails of its highest result. When they speak, bones "come together, bone to bone"; there is a stir in the graves of death and corruption; a coming together of the people to hear the word; and in many cases all the appearance of a new life. The flesh comes up and skin covers them above; but (and how fatal is the admission which this *but* introduces) there is no breath in them. It is clear that no amount of human persuasiveness or oratory can secure the true regeneration of the soul. That which is born of the flesh may be galvanized by the energy of the flesh into the appearance of spiritual life, but it will always remain flesh.

When you have done your best, and have failed of the highest results, prophecy to the Spirit; cry to the *four* winds, because He may come in the icy north wind of tribulation, or the warm west wind of prosperity; but speak with the certain assurance of, "Thus saith the Lord God: Come!" There is a sense in which the believer has the privilege of commanding the Spirit of God. "Concerning the works of my hands, command ye me." When you obey the law of a force, the force will obey you; and when you yield utterly and humbly to God, the power of God will answer the summons of your faith.

Even while you are speaking, let your heart be in the attitude of expectancy; and according to your faith, it shall be done unto you. If you cannot go forth to witness or prophecy, let your prayer arise to God like a fountain day and night, that His Spirit may breathe on the slain.

*Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal.*

*Ezek. xxxviii. 3 (R. v.).*

IT is startling to meet with these three names, which are found in modern maps as Russia, Moscow, and Tobolsk, and to feel that we may be reading words that are shortly coming to pass. So far as we can see, they have not as yet been fulfilled. Within the hearing of the present generation, Russia may resolve to go up to the land of unwall'd villages, such as those that abound in Palestine, and may be challenged by the merchants of Tarshish in the far West. Some have even found an allusion to the English standard in the reference to the young lions of verse 13.

The shrewdest among us cannot guess what may await the world in the near future. Peer as we may into the dim mist, we cannot descry the events which are coming upon the earth. But we may be thankful that we have this word of prophecy, to which we "do well to take heed, as unto a light shining in a dark place." It is like the illustrated railway-table, which contains a list of the stations through which we must pass ere we reach the terminus. And as the porters call out the names, and we find that they correspond to the route as detailed on the tables, we come to place more implicit trust in our guide-book, and to count with absolute certainty on our ultimate emergence at our destination. "When ye see these things coming to pass, know ye that He is nigh, even at the doors." In the meanwhile let your loins be girt, and your lamps burning, and ye as those that wait for their Lord.

"Surely He cometh, and a thousand voices  
Shout to the saints, and to the deaf are dumb!  
Surely He cometh, and the earth rejoices,  
Glad in His coming, Who hath sworn, 'I come.'"

*Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon Israel. Ezek. xxxix. 25.*

WE must never overlook the literal significance of this promise. All Israel, insists the apostle of the Gentiles, who never lost his love for his own people, shall be saved. The blindness which has happened to them is only till the fullness of the Gentile contingent to the one Church has been brought in. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. The covenant made to their fathers cannot be annulled.

But all bringing again must originate in God. The sheep can only wander on, further and further from the fold, ever deeper into the dark mountains; it will never find its way back: if it shall see the fold again, it will be because the shepherd goes after it until he finds it.

Our natural bias is altogether away from God. The pole of our life is aslant from the pole-star. Our natural tendency is to vanity, corruption, and chaos. If God were to withdraw Himself, however slightly, from the natural world, it would revert to the darkness and confusion of its earliest stages; and whenever God is absent from our moral life, there is the natural and inevitable reversion to the original Adamtype. But God is rich in mercy, in neutralizing the effects of our evil nature. He calls us back to Himself; nay, He comes after us, and brings again our captivity for His name's sake. Are you in captivity to evil habits from which you cannot break loose; to evil associations from which you cannot free yourself; to circumstances that shut you in as iron bars? Have you come to an end of your efforts for liberty, finding the more you struggle the more deeply you involve yourself in the close-woven meshes? Then look away to the Lord God, plead His promises, ask Him to remember His holy name, and He will bring you again.



*Declare all that thou seest.*

*Ezek. xl. 4.*

WE are called to be God's witnesses, beholding the visions of God, and bearing witness to our brethren of what we have seen, tasted, and handled, of the Word of Life. When the city is draped in mist and gloom, the artist takes his portfolio and climbs into the high mountain of vision. He beholds there the crystalline beauty of the unsullied snow; the roseate hues of sunrise and sunset; the heaped magnificence of the glaciers, with their blue depth. Transferring his visions to his canvas, he returns to this lower sphere, and exhibits his picture on the walls of some public gallery, from which it silently witnesses to one of shy Nature's coyest moods. But the passers-by are apt to accuse him of extravagance. Ah, but they have not stood where he stood, or seen what he has beheld! It is thus in Divine things also.

God often leads His children into startling and unexpected experiences. They are troubled on every side; bereft of dear ones; deprived of health or property; compelled to pass through the scorching fires of slander, misunderstanding, and temptation. But these are the times when they should *set their hearts* on all that is being shown, to see the way by which God is leading them; the comfort with which He is comforting them; the help in which He is environing them. They have been brought to these experiences that they may know themselves, and God, and His ways of dealing with His people; and may be able to declare what they have been taught, to the intent that unto the principalities and powers in the heavenlies may be known through the Church the manifold wisdom of God. No vision is for private advantage and jubilation only; declare it all.



*He brought me to the Temple, and measured.*

*Ezek. xli. 1.*

THIS is the pattern of an ideal Temple, which was presented in thought to the prophet's mind, as the pattern of the Tabernacle was shown to Moses on the Mount. It is interesting to notice the minute measurements and specifications—even to the ornaments of cherubim and palm-trees. We cannot but remember that the plan of our life is also worked out before the face of God, and that we shall live to the best purpose when we make all things according to the pattern shown us on the Mount of Prayer and Vision.

Ever remember to look upward to God's pattern, and do nothing except what He reveals as His will for you ; whilst careful to omit nothing that has been prepared for you to say or do, Look up, child of God ; look into the plan of your temple-building. The holy places of prayer ; the altars of your sacrifice and consecration ; the tables of your fellowship ; the doors that lead out to work and open into chambers of pain and suffering ; the length and breadth of each ; the ornamentation to be chased upon your soul—all, all are fixed. Let your one aim be that God's will for you should be realized in you ; and dare to believe that, if only you will yield to Him, He will work out in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, to whom shall be the glory forever and ever.

Only remember three rules:—(1) Keep your eye directed outward and upward, to Christ exalted in the glory. (2) Be careful to maintain the silence of the Sabbath-rest within—rest from your own thoughts and ways. (3) Do not be always speaking of God as having said or shown this or that : let men form their own conclusions.

*The priests that are near unto the Lord shall eat the most holy things.*      *Ezek. xlii. 13 (R. V.).*

EVERY believer is a priest unto God. He may not exercise his priesthood; but when he was washed from his sins in the blood of the Lamb, he was constituted a priest unto God, even the Father. We are called, not to offer propitiatory sacrifices—there is no need for this, since Jesus when He died offered the one sufficient oblation for the sins of the world—but to present ourselves living sacrifices, to offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, and to do good and communicate of our substance to the help of others.

Are you near unto the Lord? Hath He chosen you to stand before Him, and know His will, and hear the word from His mouth? Then most certainly you will often enter into the inner chamber to eat of the most holy things. These are enumerated as the meat-offering, the sin-offering, and the guilt-offering. We must have fellowship with God in His joy over the spotless character and lovely human life of Jesus, which may be compared to fine flour. We must have fellowship in the atoning death of our Substitute; feeding on all the sacred meaning of the wondrous Cross. We must avail ourselves of Jesus as our guilt-offering; making propitiation for our mistakes, negligences, and infirmities (Lev. ii., iv., v.).

If you would be near to God, feed on the work of Jesus; if you are near to God, you cannot live without it. To muse on the propitiatory aspects of the death of Jesus is as necessary for the strength of our inner life as food is to the body. Let us beware of imitating the mistake of Lev. x. 16–20; and let us be very careful to eat of the wave-breast and the heave-thigh, which stand for the love of Jesus for our affections, and the might of Jesus for our strength (Lev. x. 14).

*Behold the glory of the Lord filleth the house.*

*Ezek. xliii. 2-7.*

AT the beginning of this book (chaps. ix. and x.) we beheld the departure of the Shekinah cloud from the doomed temple. But now, to the new reconstructed temple it returns. So will God shed the sense of His presence through our hearts. We may have grieved Him, and lost it by defiling His holy name, and by the abominations which we have committed. But if we will resolutely put away our unfaithfulness, our coquetting with the world, our tampering with the flesh, He will return and dwell in our midst forever. Behold, the glory of the Lord will fill the inner shrine of our spirit, and the earth will shine with His glory.

“Heaven above is softer blue;  
Earth beneath is sweeter green;  
Something shines in every hue  
Christless eyes have never seen.”

There is a very precious promise connected with the Divine return and indwelling: “I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel, and they shall no more defile My holy name” (ver. 7). Be willing to admit God, and He will come. “If any man open the door, I will come in.” Whenever God comes He will make the old sin abhorrent and impossible; and His indwelling will not be transient and fitful, but permanent and efficient. “They shall *no more* defile.”

This is what we need. We cannot have holiness apart from the Holy One. The attribute may not be divorced from its possessor. But to the soul that desires holiness, the holy God comes, and infills, and keeps; so that darkness cannot intrude on the domain of light, nor hate on love, nor death on life. Has the Shekinah left thee? Lo, it returns by the way it went, and thine earthly life shall shine again.

*I am their inheritance. . . . I am their possession.*

*Ezek. xliv. 28.*

THESE injunctions for the priests, the Levites, that keep the charge of the sanctuary, are full of suggestion to those who have been made priests to God and the Father. It is for us to enter into the Holy Place, to come near His table to minister unto His Father, and to keep His charge (ver. 16), always remembering that we need the sin-offering whenever we approach God (ver. 27). However holy a man becomes, as the revelation of God's perfect holiness breaks upon him, there is need to shelter beneath the blood that was shed.

But when these features of our ministry have been realized, we have a right to look on God as our inheritance and possession. How wonderful that in a deep sense we may obtain supplies of Divine help from our fellowship with God ! To follow out the literal comparison of an inheritance would suggest that as the peasant proprietors of Palestine raised crops on their lands, so we may obtain, by prayer and faith, out of the very heart of God, all things that are needful for life and godliness.

We possess God as the flower the sunlight ; as a babe the mother. All His resources are placed at our disposal. The seed cast into the ground immediately begins to take from earth and air the nutriment of its life, and we have the same power of deriving from the infinite fullness of God all that shall make us pure and strong and gentle. Ours are the unsearchable riches of Christ ; we are made full through the fullness which God the Father has been pleased to make dwell in Him. All the resources which have been placed at His disposal in His ascension and eternal reign are gifts which He holds for men. Alas for us that we fail to possess our possessions !

*And so shalt thou do for every one that erreth,  
and for him that is simple. Ezek. xlv. 20.*

A VERY touching provision is here. When the services of the newly constituted temple were in full operation, and the priests were performing the usual rites in all the pomp and splendor of their ceremonial on the behalf of all righteous and godly souls, there was to be special thought of the erring and simple ; for these two characters a special offering was made. Perhaps the erring were too hardened and the simple too obtuse to bring an offering for themselves ; but they were not forgotten. The blood of the sin-offering was to be placed on the posts of the house and on the posts of the gate of the inner court, each seventh day of the month, on their behalf.

Whenever we draw around the altar of God, whether in the home or church, we should remember the erring and simple. If a family misses from its ranks one erring member, its prayer and thought are more directed toward that one than to those that have not gone astray. Does not the child who is deficient in its intellect attract more loving care than those who are able to care for themselves? Should it be otherwise in God's home? Was it not for erring Peter that Jesus prayed? Was it not for Thomas that He made another special visit to the upper room? Does not the Great Shepherd gently lead those that are with young? And in so far as we enter into God's mind, we, too, shall care for the ignorant and those who are out of the way.

There is room for all such in the Father's House—a warm welcome and ample provision. Like Samuel's words about David, so God speaks of the most inconspicuous members of His family, "Send and fetch him ; for we will not sit down till he come hither."

*The Prince in the midst of them, when they go in,  
shall go in.*

*Ezek. xlv. 10.*

THESE are regulations for ingress and egress in the temple which Ezekiel describes; but we may be pardoned for finding a true and tender thought of the new relationship of Christ and His own.

We, too, go in, to find pasture within the precincts of the fold; to worship in the Holy Place, to get refreshment and strength; as when Jonathan and David met in the wood and strengthened each other's hands in God. On the Lord's Day especially we go in where the seraphim stand around the sapphire throne. But of what avail is it to go in, unless our Prince accompanies us? His presence makes the feast; His company is as sunlight to nature; to hear His voice, to feel the touch of His hand, to sit in His near proximity—this is the bread of life divine.

But there are times when we must go forth; we must leave the transfiguration mount for the valley. The bugle-note rings out in the starry dawn, and tells us that the foe is approaching. The look-out watch calls from the mast-head that the enemies' ships are in view. There is work to be done, suffering borne, difficulty encountered. But when we go forth, our Prince and we shall go forth together (R. v.).

He never puts His sheep forth without going before them. He never thrusts us into the fight without preceding us. If we have to take the way of the Cross, we may always count on seeing Him go first, though we follow Him amazed.

No ascent so steep that we cannot see His form in advance; no stones so sharp that are not flecked with His blood; no fire so intense that One does not go beside us, whose form is like the Son of God; no waters so deep that Emmanuel does not go beside us.



*Everything shall live whither the river cometh.*

*Ezek. xlvii. 9.*

THE great need of the world is life. Not more intelligence or activity, but life, and fuller life—life more abundant, life in full tide; the life which is life indeed, the eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested to the world. Of that life, this river is the emblem. It issues from the throne of God. It ever tends to become fuller and deeper. It becomes finally too mighty to be crossed.

The course of the river of the prophet's vision was due east, to the Arabah, a desert waste, and the Dead Sea, in whose dark, brackish waters no fish can live; but as even these are smitten by the crystal tide, a wonderful change takes place—they are healed, and begin to abound with fish, and fishers stand beside it from Engedi to En-eglaim.

This has been the course of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Ever since the river of the water of life issued from the Cross it has been deepening and extending, bringing life and beauty into the waste and barren wilderness of the world. The transforming effects of the Gospel on continents and islands, on vast multitudes of men, can be compared to nothing less than the fertilizing effect of a mighty river. Flow on, great sea of God, until all the Dead Sea of sin is swept away before thy beneficent waters!

But chiefly we want this more abundant life within us. Are there no Dead Seas, no marshes, no waste stretches of desert sands? Is there not urgent need that the lengthening out of our days should see a deepening of the river until it rise beyond our depths? We need the ankle-depths of walking to be exchanged for the knee-depths of praying; and these for the loin-depths of perfect purity; and these for the length, depth, breadth, and height of the love of Christ.



*The Lord is there.*

*Ezek. xlviii. 35.*

EZEKIEL has in view an ideal city ; whether in any material form it is to be realized, we must wait to see. But this shall be its prominent characteristic, that God will be there. A great voice will be heard out of heaven, saying, " Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people ; and God Himself shall be with them and be their God."

*There is comfort in this for the sorrowful ;* because where God is, there cannot be sorrow, nor crying, nor pain. God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces. No cypress-trees line the streets of that city ; no dirge intrudes upon the glad ascription of praise ; no sob or groan is possible.

*There is comfort for far-dissevered friends ;* for where God is, the centre and goal and home, all His children meet. Back from distant lands and spheres they come ; home from the school where they have been taught ; back from the voyage ; back from the military camp ; back from the tour of exploration. The gates stand open to admit to His heart ; and that heart is the rendezvous of those who have come out of every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people—never again to be parted.

*There is comfort for the doubting and perplexed.* Here, night often reigns over the heart of Thomas and the mind of Mary. Truly devoted souls grope by candle-light, and sometimes they walk in darkness and have no light, learning to walk by faith. But there all mysteries will be unravelled, all problems solved, every question answered ; there will be no night, no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God shall lighten it, and the Lamb shall be the lamp thereof.

*And Daniel continued even unto the first year of King Cyrus.*  
*Dan. i. 21.*

IS that wonderful? It may seem so when you consider the uncertainty of Oriental politics, and the feverish haste with which favorites are raised to confidential positions and thrust back again to obscurity. In this very book we have glimpses of the virulence of hatred entertained in the court of Babylon toward Jews, and the mortification with which aspirants for the royal favor found it monopolized by Daniel and his friends. But we cease to wonder when we turn to chap. vi. 10, and discover Daniel's habit of kneeling upon his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks to his God. Prayer is the secret of continuance.

To all deep lives there come moments of serious questioning: Shall I be able to hold out? Shall I always be able to withstand the virulent hate of my foes, and overcome the corruption of my heart? Will it be always possible to meet the strong and imperious demands of duty, and the appeal of those who look to me for help? Amid the changes that the years may bring, will it be possible to maintain my ground? Men are so capricious; events so fluctuating; the sea of human life so unstable. To all such suggestions there is but one reply—prayer is the secret of continuance.

It is a dangerous temptation of the adversary, so writes one of God's hidden ones, when upright minds suffer themselves to be completely cast down by the unbelieving—I had almost said *proud*—view of their infirmities: in the performance of God's works such ought only to humble themselves, and go forward. He who loves and exercises prayer, will in due time be translated from self unto God: from being a pitcher, filled and emptied, to a river-bed.

*Then was the secret revealed in a night vision.*

*Dan. ii. 17, 18, 19.*

THIS prayer-meeting, called hurriedly, must have been very intense. There was no knowing whether it might not be interrupted before it was completed by the guards of the palace summoning the supplicants to die. These two or three were gathered in the name of God, in rooms which never before had heard His name. But when their prayers had been offered, such serene peace resulted that Daniel was able to sleep with the utmost composure; and his mind, like a mirror, received upon its placid depths the impression of God's thoughts.

It is a test of prayer having attained its object, when the praying soul feels there is no need to wrestle longer, and the sweet assurance is borne in that God has received our supplication, and that further words are needless. This serenity of heart shows itself in the unruffled calm of the commercial man in a time of panic; in the quietness of the soul under provocation; in the stayedness of the heart on God, while storms sweep earth and sky.

It has been pointed out that there are three New Testament words for prayer to which we do well to take heed. *Be sober* unto prayer (1 Peter iv. 7). Do not be drunk with worldly vanity, business, or gaiety; but bring a humble, penitent, clear, and sound mind. *Be at leisure* when you pray (1 Cor. vii. 5). The word means that prayer is not to be hurried; that nothing should interfere with its leisurely enjoyment. *Labor* at prayer (Col. i. 29; or iv. 12). As a man labors at his daily work, or strives on the battlefield, or agonizes to preserve a beloved friend from danger. It was thus that Jesus labored in the Garden of Gethsemane. And it was thus that these faithful souls must have prayed.

*Lo, I see four men loose.*

*Dan. iii. 25.*

THERE was no doubt about their being bound. Their turbans, mantles, and other garments had bound their limbs so tightly, that when first they reached the furnace they fell down bound in its midst. Whatever else the fire could not do, it at least freed them, so that they walked loose; and the dewy glades of Paradise were not more fragrant and delightful than were those white-hot cinders.

This is what trial has often done for us. We had become conscious of the binding effect of our own habits which we had permitted as comparatively innocent; but gradually the conviction grew that they were amongst the weights that should be laid aside. Yet they clung to us until some fiery trial befell us, and from that hour, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, we were free. Do not fear the fire. It cannot hurt one hair of your head, or leave the smell of burning on you; but it will eat out the alloy, and gnaw away the iron bands that bound you.

“Beat on, true heart, forever!  
Shine bright, strong golden chain;  
And bless the cleansing fire  
And the furnace of living pain.”

But Jesus never allows His beloved to walk the fire alone. If it is heated seven times hotter than its wont, this is only the reason for His becoming more real, as our living and glorious Friend. There always goes besides the tried saint, though not always patent even to the eye of the spirit, another whose aspect is that of the Son of God. Reach out thy hands to Him, beloved—He is there. The Refiner not only watches the crucible, He is in it with thee. In all thy affliction, He is afflicted.

*All His works are truth, and His ways judgment.*

*Dan. iv. 37.*

THIS is the confession of a heathen king ; but how true it is, and how well for us, if we dare to affirm, amid all the appearances to the contrary, and all the shrinking of the natural man, that all God's works are truth and His ways righteous, not only in the wide circumference of the heavens, but in the tiny circle of our little life.

The main lesson, let us note it, which this chapter is designed to teach, and which Nebuchadnezzar epitomizes in these words, is the abhorrence with which God regards pride. We are all tempted to walk on the terrace of our palace, and say, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?" But to speak thus is to incur the displeasure of the Most High, who giveth the kingdom to whomsoever He will.

If thou hast achieved a position of wealth and independence and success, do not be proud of it, as though it were all of thy own creating. God gave thee power to get wealth ; raised thee to that responsible position as His agent and trustee ; and made thy name as one of the great over the earth. Give Him the glory, and be sure to consider thyself only as His steward, entrusted with His property, and continued in thy position for a long time as thou art faithful in thine administration.

May not that illness, that suspension from active work, that serious deprivation, have been sent to thee, as this madness was permitted to come to the King of Babylon, that thou shouldest know and acknowledge that the heavens do rule? Remember that the watchers and the holy ones still walk the world with viewless footprints, and give in their account.

*I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations and dissolve doubts. Dan. v. 16.*

THE perplexed world often turns to the Christian in its hours of anguish and terror. While the foe seems powerless, and the hall of life is full of light and song; while the merry feet chase the flying hours, and mirth is unrestrained; whilst the wine flows freely, and the courtiers whisper flattery—the servant of God may be left in obscurity and neglect, as Daniel by Belshazzar. At such times God Himself is an object of ridicule and scorn. But let a hand come from out the Infinite, and write on the walls of life's palace in words of mystery, then the panic-stricken worldlings cry out for one in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God, and who can decipher the mysterious hieroglyphics, which to conscience forebode only disaster.

At such hours the child of God is kept in perfect peace. How should it be otherwise? He recognizes his Father's handwriting, and can decipher his Father's meaning. Amid the crash of falling kingdoms he is sure of his Father's care. Oblivious of his own interests, he is only anxious to interpret the ways of God, to recall the sinner, and save the State.

The world has more respect for our religion than it cares to admit in its gay moods, and it is noticing us more than we dream. Some day those who treat you with least courtesy will send for you. Only be at peace, and rest in your Father's Spirit. It shall be given you in that same hour what ye should speak. In the meanwhile, do not be surprised if you are led through many mysterious and trying experiences. It is only so that you can get the key to God's secrets, or the clue to His mysteries. Above all, seek for the Spirit of God, that light and understanding and excellent wisdom may be found in thee.



*No manner of hurt was found upon him, because he had trusted in his God. Dan vi. 23 (R. V.).*

BY faith they shut the mouths of lions. The lions' den is not an old-world experience merely. God's saints still dwell among lions, and fight with the wild beasts of Ephesus. Like David, God's people have abundant cause to cry, "They have compassed us in our steps: they set their eyes to cast us down to the earth. He is like a lion that is greedy of his prey, and, as it were, a young lion, lurking in secret places." But still God sends His angel to shut the lions' mouths; still faith surrounds us with His unseen protection. Or, if the lion seems to triumph, it is only in appearance. Was not the martyr Ignatius more than a conqueror when he said:

"I bid all men know that of my own free will I die for God, unless ye should hinder me. I exhort you, be ye not an unseasonable kindness to me. Let me be given to the wild beasts, for through them I can attain unto God. I am God's wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found pure bread of Christ. Rather entice the wild beasts that they may become my sepulchre, and may leave no part of my body behind; so that I may not, when I am fallen asleep, be burdensome to any one. . . . Now I am beginning to be a disciple. May naught of things visible and things invisible impede me, that I may attain unto Jesus Christ. Come fire, and iron, and grapplings with wild beasts, cuttings, and manglings, crushings of my whole body—only be it mine to attain unto Jesus Christ."

Whether faith closes the mouth of the lion, or gives the soul such an entire deliverance from all fear, it is the same in essence and operation, and shows its heavenly temper with the ease with which it overcomes the world.



*There was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom.*

*Dan. vii. 14.*

JESUS does rule. The kingdom of Christ is no fanciful phrase. The words He spoke, the deeds He did, have shaped the religious life and thought of the civilized world. But this is the lowest ground. He is supreme over all creation. In Him the ancient psalm is fulfilled, "Thou hast put all things under His feet. All sheep and oxen, the fowl of the air, the fish of the sea, and the beasts of the field." The Father hath set Him at His own right hand, far above all principality and power; all angels do His bidding; all demon-powers are beneath His feet. Joseph, our Brother, is King.

But let us never forget that the foundation of His kingdom is His Cross. We want more than the truth, more than a guide to show the way; we need forgiveness, salvation, life: and these are only possible through the death of the Redeemer. Satan offered Him the kingdom when he met Him in the wilderness, and He would not have it on such terms. With face set for Calvary, He went down the mountain to the valley of the shadow of death; and having traversed it, He came to His disciples and said, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ; for Thou art the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.

That kingdom is an everlasting one. "All kingdoms will pass away before Christ's as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor." The shaking of the kings and kingdoms of this world has already begun, and is destined to shake to the ground the most stable edifices of human pride; but as we are to receive a kingdom that cannot be moved, let us not be troubled.

*Then I rose up, and did the king's business.*

*Dan. viii. 27.*

FEW men have been favored with such visions and revelations as fell to the lot of Daniel. The future, in so many different aspects, was repeatedly unfolded before him, and he saw much that elated and that depressed him. But through it all he steadily did the king's business; so far as he knew, nothing was allowed to suffer or get behind. He would have counted it a great slur on his religious life if it could have been said that his visions and exercises interfered with his service to the king. Probably he did better work because his life was hid with God.

In all this there is much of suggestion and warning. We too must have our secret mount of vision. We too must look across the valley for that blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. We too must have the vision of the evenings and mornings. But that is not enough. We must do our business in the world. Not star-gazing, but following the Star; not always standing at the window, but going to and fro in the King's household, seeing that every one is at his post, and that the Royal household is properly fed; not always on the mount of transfiguration, but hastening whithersoever the uplifted hand of human need beckons us.

At the same time, it will quicken us to do our business better if we have had a vision. Nothing makes so good a workman as thorough comprehension of his Master's purposes. And when Jesus calls us not servants only, but friends, we serve Him with deep appreciation of His thoughts and plans. Our service is more refined, diligent, and intelligent. Get your plan in the mount, and then build.

*At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment went forth.* Dan ix. 23 (R. V.).

THIS is always so. Directly a God-given prayer is uttered, the commandment goes forth. There is a sense, indeed, in which true prayer is the anticipation in the human heart of the Divine intention: "Before they call I will answer; and whilst they are yet speaking I will hear." Does it seem as though your prayer were like a ship lost at sea, which brings no cargo home? Dare to believe that the commandment did go forth, though as yet it has not reached you. It is operating; and before long you shall see the result. "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye have received them." The answer may not have come to hand, but it has been granted. Even if you do not live to see the answer, dare to believe that it is assured.

What a tender address is this—"greatly beloved"! And the margin says *very precious*. Is it really so, that we are very precious to God? To those who believe, Christ is precious; but how wonderful that they should be amongst His jewels, who were born of the first Adam, and have cost so much pain and sorrow by their sins! There is no accounting for love. Directly love begins to enumerate the reasons for its attachment, it ceases to be true love. Love knows no law except the drawing of an inward affinity. So Jesus draws near to us. We are very precious to Him. To have our love well compensates Him for all His bitter sorrow. Let us be very careful not to hurt Him, or give Him needless grief. And when we pray, let it be with the assurance that He bends over us and says, "Thou art greatly beloved; ask what thou wilt." As soon as the child of God says "Father," the whole Godhead is quick to hear His request.

*O man greatly beloved, fear not ; peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong.* Dan. x. 19.

WHY should we fear? We are loved, *greatly beloved* ; loved to God's uttermost ; loved to the gift of His Only-begotten ; loved to tears ; loved to blood-shedding and death. It is said that Jesus, having loved His own, which were in the world, loved them *unto the end* ; not to the end of His human ministry, but to the uttermost of what love can be (John xiii. 1, R. v., *marg.*).

Why should we *fear*? Has God done so much, and will He not do all? Has He brought us out of Egypt to let us perish in the wilderness? Is He so careful of the soul, and so careless of all beside? There are mysteries—mysteries of life and death, of sin and sorrow, of this world and the next ; but fear not : God is ours, and we are His by immutable and indissoluble ties.

Let us possess ourselves in *peace*. We cannot understand, but we can trust. We may not know the way we are going, but we can lean back on the heart of our Guide ; standing in the cleft of the Rock we can look out in peace on dreaded evils as they pass away together, dismayed and amazed. If only we are acquainted with God, we shall be at peace, and thereby good will come to us. They fear who look at circumstances, and not into God's face.

And we shall be *strong*—strong to endure ; strong to achieve ; strong to wait ; strong to carry the battle to the gate ; strong to set our face like a flint, when the hour strikes for us to go to the cross ; strong to be glad when the crowds ebb away from us to follow the dear Master, Christ :—

“ Be strong to hope, O heart ! Though day is bright,  
The stars can only shine in the dark night.

Be strong, O heart of mine, and look toward the light.”

*The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.*  
*Dan. xi. 32.*

DANIEL probably refers to the great persecution under Antiochus, when the followers of Judas Maccabæus, knowing their God, and keeping loyal to Him amidst the general defection, refused to bow before the idols of Syria. These were strong in God's strength, and did exploits never surpassed in the annals of those who have suffered for the truth.

There are many ways of knowing God—through the Bible, in solitary meditation, and preëminently in the person of Jesus; but we also come to know Him by the daily experience and intercourse of life. Those who live with you in the same house know and read you in an intimacy of knowledge which no other method can rival. Learn to live with God! Summer and winter with Him! “Abide in Him!”

In the Epistle to the Ephesians there are three prayers, which the apostle was wont to offer for his converts. First, that they might know; next, that they might be strong; lastly, that they might watch unto prayer. All our knowledge of God should be turned to practical use. Few things injure us more than to seek knowledge for its own sake. Know, that you may do.

Then you will be strong to do exploits. When a man is sure of his base of operations; sure that those in the rear of his march will back him up; sure that a strong and wise friend behind him is pledged to his support—his heart is at peace, he can concentrate all his attention and energy on the work that is on hand. He has no care, the Greek word for which means *division*. When we really know God, and understand how utterly faithful He is to those who venture forth in faith, we can do what others dare not attempt.

*Go thou thy way till the end be.*

*Dan. xii. 13.*

MAN becomes mystified with the great circle of God's Providence. He tries to follow it, but his eyesight fails; his heart and head grow weary. And God says, It is enough—go thy way till the end be: learn thy lesson; do thy work; tread the predetermined path: it is enough that thou shouldst fulfill thy little day; evening will be here presently, and then thou shalt rest; leave the evolution of My vast schemes to Me; I will bring all right; and “thou shalt stand in thy lot at the end of the days.”

*Thy way.*—For every one that way is prepared; identical in the main outlines, but special for the footsteps that are destined to tread it. There are three elements, which are almost certainly present—Suffering, the strain of Toil, and Temptation. So long as the blight of the curse lingers on our earth, these will be the ingredients in our cup. But let us go on our way. It is graduated to our steps. God's grace will be sufficient for us.

*Our lot.*—What will it be? As Canaan was allotted, so will heaven be. Where shall we stand? Among the overcomers, or the martyrs, or the virgin souls that follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, or those that get the victory over the Beast? Or shall our lot be amongst those who have buried their talents, forgotten their oil, and proved disobedient and self-indulgent? “Make us to be numbered with Thy saints in glory everlasting.”

*Thou shalt Rest.*—Heaven will be to each soul what it most desires, and has missed on earth. To the lonely, Love: to those that hunger and thirst for righteousness, Holiness: to those who have dwelt amid perpetual warring and strife, Peace: to the weary, Rest—and to all the vision of God in Christ.



*He went and took Gomer, the daughter of  
Diblahim.* *Hosea i. 3.*

UNDER the glorious reign of Jeroboam, Israel had become very prosperous; but this period of wealth was one of shameless idolatry, self-indulgence, and oppression of the poor. The people were unfaithful to their marriage covenant with Jehovah; yet He loved them still. With the love that a husband may bear to the woman who is mother of his children, but who has shown herself worthless or abandoned, so God still loved, and wooed, and sought to reclaim. All this was set forth in Hosea's sad personal history.

He married one who was probably well known at the court for her infidelities. Her children's names were all significant. The first was called Jezreel, to indicate their prophetic import; the daughter, "Unpitied"; the third child, "Not My People"; and these children were accustomed, in after years, to go between the prophet and his wife and plead with her. "Plead with your mother, plead."

What a living picture this is of God's relations to ourselves! He has loved us, not because we were pure, and holy, and lovely; for, in fact, He knew that we were the very reverse. But with the clear prevision of our native sin and unfaithfulness, He took us into covenant relationship with Himself. Not because we were good, but to make us so; not because we were faithful, but to lead us to be so. He has given us all kinds of blessings. But, alas, how ill we have requited Him! We have departed from Him, and grossly betrayed His trust; till He has been reluctantly obliged to leave us to ourselves. But He waits to be gracious; and if we repent and turn to Him, He will say to us, Ammi, My people; and Ruhamah, thou hast obtained mercy.



*The valley of Achor for a door of hope.*

*Hosea ii. 15.*

WE are familiar with the story of the valley of Achor, where Achan the troubler of Israel was stoned to death. We can almost fancy the long stony valley through which again the house of Israel was made to pass. The prophet foresaw the heavy judgments which were about to fall upon the land, as God took back His corn and wine and flax, and laid waste their vines and fig-trees. It seemed as though the nation were again in the valley of trouble; and as the people take their weary way, dropping with fatigue and privation, behold, a door suddenly opens in the stony wall of flint, through which they pass into a land of corn, and wine, and wifely loyalty to their true husband. Thus the traveller piercing the Alps will, within the space of an hour, leave the northern slopes of ice and snow, and emerge upon the fertile plains of Italy.

It is a beautiful similitude, and one that still has its counterpart in spiritual experience. You, too, are in the valley of Achor—brought there in consequence of your sins; your life is overcast; your heart desolate. Ah, how different it is with you now, compared with those first glad days when you went out after God, in the kindness of your youth, and the love of your espousals! God cannot leave you. He comes and pleads, “Return unto Me; thou art Mine.” Will you answer His tender pleading with repentance, faith, and prayer? Will you cry, “Oh that it were with me as in the first days!” Then, immediately, right before you, the door of hope will spring open; and you will pass from winter to summer; from ice to vernal heat. Dare to believe that in your Valley of Achor there is but a door between you and the Divine betrothal—only a step.

*Afterward shall the children of Israel return,  
and seek the Lord their God. Hosea iii. 5.*

THE unfaithful wife had left husband and children, and sunk into abject poverty and shameful disgrace ; but Hosea is bidden to seek her again and bring her to his home. It was a wonderful act of condescending love on his part, to be willing to condone the past and take the poor stricken thing to his well-ordered dwelling. Nothing could have done it but the strong love which had followed her through all her wanderings, refusing to let her go. We cannot certainly affirm that Hosea's love succeeded in making his Guinevere fair and lovely again ; but we may cherish the hope that in this his compassionate love was recompensed.

Through the tragedy of the prophet's domestic life, the people were called to see the mystery of the Divine faithful love. "The Lord loveth the children of Israel, though they turn unto other gods and love cakes of raisins" (ver. I, R. V.). The people in their wandering and rebellion had been unfaithful to the marriage-vow plighted at Sinai. They had gone after many lovers ; but God's redeeming love would not let them go. That love still follows them ; and though they have been for so many centuries without king, prince, sacrifice, or temple ; they shall doubtless return to God. And is not this marvellous Zionist movement one further step toward the ultimate recognition and reunion ?

You, too, have been without king or priest ; without tears of penitence, or smiles of conscious acceptance. But the love of God has never ceased to follow you. And now, in your abject need, He seeks you out, and says, "Be for Me only." Will you not come back to the goodness of God in these your latter days ?

*The Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land.*

*Hosea iv. 1, 3.*

THROUGHOUT the Old Testament the sin of the people and the prosperity or otherwise of their country are closely conjoined. If the people please God, harvests are plentiful, and the seasons of the year pursue their round in unbroken bounty. If the people backslide, the land is smitten. There is probably a much deeper connection than we suppose between the moral condition of our nation and its prosperity. It is at least remarkable that ever since the Indian Government has legalized impurity in India, and has made money out of the vices of Chinamen, that empire has been smitten with drought and pestilence. So with Africa; the injustice with which the natives have been treated has been terribly avenged in the rinderpest which has swept over the land. And may there not be a close connection between the vice, Sabbath-breaking, and drunkenness of Great Britain, and the agricultural distress which has so long driven our people from the open country to life in the cities? It is an awful thing when God has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. Sin is then terribly avenged.

One noticeable feature with all the prophets is their intense devotion to God on the one hand, and their ardent patriotism on the other. They never scrupled to denounce the sins which were bringing their land to desolation, and to indicate the inevitable result. In the present instance, Hosea turned on the priests and showed how accountable they were for the desolation of the country.

On a wider scale still, we remember that creation groaneth and travaileth in pain because of sin; and its emancipation awaits the advent of the Lord, and the manifestation of His saints (Rom. viii. 21).

*I will go and return to My place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek My face. Hosea v. 15.*

THE withdrawal of God's countenance and protection involved the exile of Israel from their own land. No weapon formed against them could prosper, so long as they walked with their Almighty Friend ; but sin severed them from His care, and cut them adrift to be swept before the storm of the invader.

There is always a "till" in God's withdrawals. He tears that He may heal ; goes that He may come ; leaves, that He may return so soon as the afflicted soul is led to seek His face. May not this be your lot ? You seem deserted by man and God ; life is going very hardly with you ; thick darkness broods over your soul, and sore affliction devastates your life ; yes, and worse is threatened. But is there not an offence somewhere that needs to be acknowledged ; a sin that should be confessed ?

Search yourself by the suggestions of this chapter. Have you in any way been a snare or a net to other souls, injuring them by your example or conversation (ver. 1) ? Have you been unfaithful to your immortal lover, Christ (ver. 3) ? Have you become proud of any of God's gifts, or the position to which they have lifted you (ver. 5) ? Have you been grasping and fraudulent, like those who secretly remove the landmark to include a little more of their neighbor's lands with their own (ver. 10) ? Have you willingly walked after the statutes of Omri (ver. 11, and 1 Kings xvi. 25) ? Have you gone for help away from God to some unhallowed alliance, such as is represented by King Jareb, the Assyrian, whose alliance Israel sought (ver. 13) ? Ask God what controversy He has with you, and put it away. You will be astonished to discover what evils you have been harboring. But the result will be salutary indeed.

*Let us follow on to know the Lord ; His going forth is sure as the morning. Hosea vi. 3 (R. V.).*

YOU may always count on God. If there is variation in His relations with us, it is on our side, not on His. Just as surely as we return to Him, we shall find Him running to meet and greet and receive us with a glad welcome.

The exquisite words of the text derive additional beauty when we consider them in the light of modern astronomy. The spot on which we live, when the day is done, slowly turns away from the face of the sun ; and as each moment passes, plunges further and further from its wholesome, blessed light. At midnight we look out into the abyss of space in the opposite direction to the solar throne. But the moment when we have reached our furthest from the sun is followed by another, in which we begin to return to the light and glory of the perfect day. So when the soul has reached its furthest from God, it may immediately return to Him. Let us return. Let us know. Let us follow on to know the Lord.

Is there any doubt about our reception ? No ; there cannot be. Look again at the analogy of the physical night. During our absence the sun has not shifted from his place. We shall find him waiting for us ; his going forth is prepared. We have but to pass into his blessed beams, which had not ceased to pour forth through the hours, which to us were so cold and dark. So our God is always waiting for us. He is just where we left Him. In Him can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning. As certainly as we count on the dayspring may we count on God. Move then Godwards, through the dark hours. On the third day—the day of Resurrection—He will burst on your view.

*Grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not.*

*Hosea vii. 9.*

SIN in its worst forms was prevalent among the people, and secretly deteriorated their strength. Of this, however, they were unconscious; but imagined that they were as strong as at other times, anticipating long years of national prosperity. They little weened that they had reached the old age of their history, with its attendant decrepitude and helplessness. What a striking illustration of the insidious process of decay, of unconscious deterioration, of the departure of the Samson-might while we wist it not.

But is not this always the case with the initial stages of backsliding, of which this is the most dangerous element, that we are so largely unaware of the change that has come over us? Gradually and almost insensibly we lose our watchfulness over our thoughts; our relish for the society of God's people; our delight in God's house; our interest in the salvation of others; our sensitiveness of conscience as to the conventionalities of trade or society. We do not realize it; we are not specially concerned; we have no idea that the white ant is eating out the substance of our furniture, and the dry-rot undermining the rafters of our house. Strangers are devouring our strength; grey hairs are indicating our decay—to all eyes but our own. We grow grey almost imperceptibly; the strength of our manhood is very slowly undermined; the degrees of spiritual declension are as the fall of the year through the last days of summer. But it need not be if we would regard ourselves in the mirror of God's Word.

“It is strange: but life's currents drift us  
So surely and swiftly on,  
That we scarcely notice the changes  
And how many things are gone.”



*I write for him my law in ten thousand precepts.*

*Hosea viii. 12 (R. V.).*

THE A. V. slightly differs here: "I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing." God's will is so all-sided and far-reaching in its scope, that it cannot be contained in one precept or a thousand. It needs ten thousand precepts to set forth its heights, and lengths, and breadths, and to cover all the circumstances of our lives. But how thoughtful God is in anticipating our ten thousand difficulties, perplexities, and questions; and in directing us how He would wish us to act. Anticipating all the steps of our life, God has written ten thousand precepts to guide us.

But what great things have been unfolded to us in the Law of God—using that term to cover the entire compass of revelation. Mysteries which pass the conception of angels have been placed within the reach of men. Our Father has beckoned us to share with Him the sublimest secrets of His government.

Let us not count them as strange things. We often say to one another: "Do not treat me as a stranger." And is not this the sense in which we may get estranged from the word and thought of God—keeping them only for special times; giving them courtly entertainment; but refusing to admit them to the familiarity of daily intercourse? Nothing hurts God more than this! Never perform your daily duties as though God must be shut out from them. If you keep one day sacred, it is that all time may be sanctified: if you keep one place private for prayer and worship, it is that the light which shines there may irradiate all the places of your daily occupation; if you keep one meal for special meditation on the love of Jesus, it is that whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, all should be done for Him.



*Ephraim was a watchman with my God.*

*Hosea ix. 8 (R. V.).*

*WATCH with God.*—To watch with God is the privilege of comparatively few. Eight were left outside the garden ; to three only did Jesus say, "Come and watch." To watch for the morning star, for the first flowers of the coming spring, for the coming of the Bridegroom, for the setting up of the Kingdom—such is the privilege of those elect souls who are bidden to take their lamps, and go forth to meet the Bridegroom. It is a high honor to be appointed to watch with God the slow evolution of His purpose ; to stand on the watch-tower and see what He will say ; to be a watchman for the people, a spokesman of their danger when the sword approaches ; to be allowed to enter into some of His tears, and yearnings, and prayers, as He beholds the city and weeps over it.

*Watch against sin.*—But we may be displaced from that position of privilege and responsibility as Israel was. We learn that at this time the chosen had *deeply corrupted* themselves, as in the darkest days of the Judges ; and we may fall into similar corruption and rebellion, unless we watch ourselves, whilst we watch with God. Let us watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation. Corruption is always around us in this world of death. Its germs float on every breeze. We need, therefore, to steep ourselves in the antiseptic of the Holy Spirit's grace. This is the true Eucalyptus in which the germs of disease perish.

*Watch unto Prayer.*—"Prayer," said Phillips Brooks, "is not compelling God's reluctance, but laying hold of God's willingness." It is as though we waited for God's movements to bless us, and taking the stream at the flow, launched our heavy barge upon it, that His power might bear us forward.

*Break up your fallow ground ; for it is time to seek the Lord.*

*Hosea. x. 12.*

*THE fallow ground.*—There is a great deal of fallow ground in our hearts and lives ; it has borne no crops of righteousness. Weeds have covered the unfruitful acres with their rank growth, and have scattered their thistledown into other lots. The rain has fallen and the sun has shone in vain. In some cases our daily business life—in other cases our social life—is a blank, so far as religious usefulness is concerned. God gets no revenue from these barren fallow tracts. But the prophet bids us ascertain what they are, and break up the hard, caked surface by ploughshare and spade.

*Breaking up the clods.*—In his great sermon on this text, Finney exhorts to break up the fallow ground by the payment of neglected debts ; the putting aside of evil habits ; the righting of old wrongs ; the forgiveness of old injuries.

*It is time to seek the Lord.*—The days are passing over us so rapidly, and we shall be at the end before we are well aware. “It is high time to awake out of sleep ; . . . the night is far past, the day is at hand.” May not the time past suffice us to have been barren and unfruitful ; and shall we not make the best of the time which remains ?

*He will come and rain.*—What a glorious promise ! He will come and rain down righteousness. It is parallel to the words of the psalm : “Righteousness hath looked down from heaven.” It is certain that righteousness will never spring up in the furrows of our souls unless it has come down to us from the heart of God. In us are only the dark, bare, liveless clods, lying open in their need : in Him all that is pure, and holy, and righteous—but God waits to rain it down in plentiful showers.

*I taught Ephraim to go.*

*Hosea xi. 3.*

THIS is very touching. It is one of the sweetest, tenderest words in the Bible—a metaphor borrowed fresh from the nursery. What an epoch it is in the child's life when it first gets upon its feet! The mother sets it there, or it manages to get up by itself. But it dare not walk; it must be taught to go. Sometimes the mother holds the clothes from behind, or reaches out her hands in front, or hovers around the little hesitating figure with outstretched arms to guard against the first sign of tumbling. The lesson is not learned all at once. Sometimes many a sad fall tutors the venturesome pupil; but the mother is not discouraged. With a kiss and a "never mind" she puts the little one on its feet again, and teaches it to go.

God is teaching us to go. He holds our hands in His; walks beside us with outstretched arms to see that we do not fall to our entire undoing; catches us when we are about to stumble, and picks us up when we have fallen to our hurt. God is never discouraged, any more than the mother is; and the more weak our ankle-bones and nervous our gait the more care does He expend.

There are stages beyond this. There is the *walk* that pleases God; the *running*, when He has enlarged our heart; the *mounting up* with the wings of eagles. But at the end of life we come back to the going: I will *go* unto the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and upon the harp I will praise Thee, O God, my God.

"I have no help but Thine, nor do I need  
Another arm save Thine to lean upon!  
It is enough, my Lord, enough indeed;  
My strength is in Thy might, Thy might alone!"

*By his strength he had power with God.*

*Hosea xii. 3.*

JACOB'S strength lay in his weakness. As long as he seemed strong, and was able to oppose force to force, he failed of the highest blessing ; but when the sinew of his thigh shrivelled beneath the angel's touch, and was out of joint ; when he was in imminent danger of falling helplessly to the ground—he prevailed, and received the name of Israel the Prince.

*The eloquence of tears.*—"He wept." There is no record of these tears in Genesis, but we can well understand that they flowed freely. The entire results of Jacob's life—wife, children, and fortune—were at stake. With one fell sweep, Esau on the morrow might reduce him to the loneliness with which he had passed over Jordan years before. God is touched by tears. He puts them in His bottle. He hears the voice of our weeping, and interprets it.

*The power of prayer.*—"He made supplication." "I will not let Thee go unless Thou bless me." Remember how the Syro-Phenician mother cast herself at the Saviour's feet, and pleaded for help. The Lord kept her waiting till her prayer had reached a pitch which only delay could have induced, and then turned to her with the assurance that all she had claimed was hers. You may be kept in the attitude of prayer through the long night, but at daybreak you may receive what you sought.

*The strength of weakness.*—As long as we can stand and hold our own, we fail of our quest. When we are lamed and broken, and unable to do more than cling, we realize God's hidden stores of blessed help. The sick child elicits most of the mother's love. The last-born babe drags down to the level of its tiny mouth its strong and brawny father.

*O death, where are thy plagues ? O grave, where is thy destruction ?*      *Hosea xiii. 14 (R. V.).*

THESE words are made familiar to us in the magnificent apostrophe with which Paul's great resurrection chapter closes. They have been recited for centuries over Christian graves.

In their first utterance they record Jehovah's resolve to deliver His people, in spite of all their sins. The conflict in the Divine heart between hatred of the abominable idolatries by which they were cursed, and His ancient, unalterable love, gives this chapter, and indeed the whole book, its remarkably disjointed character. There is hardly a paragraph which is not marked by abrupt transitions, agitation of speech, appeals, enquiries, expressions of infinite regret. But notwithstanding all, God had given commandment to bless, and He neither could nor would reverse it. Let death and Hades do their worst against His chosen, He was stronger far.

In these intermediate ages these words may be quoted over every Christian's death, whether it be a martyrdom or the quiet yielding up of life. In comparison with the great gain that death brings to those who pass to the "far better" of being with Christ, wherein are we losers by it? Nay, do we not greatly gain?

But the full realization of these words awaits the hour when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality, at the sudden appearance of the Saviour in His advent glory. Then shall be brought to pass the saying which is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. There shall not a hoof be left behind. Not one of the redeemed shall remain in the prison-house; and even in their bodies, raised in the likeness of Christ, there will be no evidence of the triumph of death or the grave.

*I am like a green fir-tree. From Me is thy fruit found.*

*Hosea xiv. 8.*

THIS chapter abounds with picturesque natural imagery. The dew distilling on the parched herbage, as the sign of the Holy Spirit. The blossoming lily, fragile but beautiful, an emblem of the retiring grace and purity of Christian character. The roots of Lebanon, descending far down into the valley, anchoring in its rugged strength, significant of the stability which in each Christian should mingle with grace. The silver beauty of the olive, the cool aromatic breath of the wind that has passed over the snows and slopes of Lebanon, commemorating the beauty and fragrance of the influence of the child of God. The covering shadow, the yellowing corn, the delicious scent of the vine, when it gives a good smell, to denote the gifts and graces of holy living. And finally, all of these summed up in the cry of Ephraim, "I am like a green fir-tree." O child of God, canst thou appropriate this wealth of imagery for thyself? Are the facts which these symbols denote true of thy life? Be not content to be as the lily, seek also to be as the rooted strength of Lebanon; be not satisfied with the similitudes of beauty, seek also those of usefulness. And above all, be an evergreen, never showing signs of autumnal decay.

But, amid it all, remember the caution—"From Me is thy fruit found." Count naught thine own but sin. Thou hast nothing thou didst not receive; thou couldst do nothing apart from Jesus. It is only as thou abidest in Him, and He in thee, that thou canst bring forth any fruit, or be fragrant, or serve any good purpose in the world.

"As some rare perfume in a vase of clay  
Pervades it with a fragrance not its own,  
So, when Thou dwellest in a mortal soul,  
All heaven's own sweetness seems around it thrown."



*Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders, and cry unto the Lord.*

*Joel i. 14 (R. V., marg.).*

IT was a terrible invasion. The locusts had lighted down upon the land of Israel; so that the seeds rotted under the clods; garners were desolate; the barns were broken down. Despair took hold of the husbandman; and the herds and flocks panted out their anguish. At this juncture the prophet called for a national fast.

Whenever our life is visited by special trials and perplexities, we should withdraw ourselves from common pursuits, and lay bare out heart-secrets, so that we may learn the cause of God's controversy with us. There is a reason and a needs-be; because He does not afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men.

From time to time a call for prayer has issued from the hearts of men closest in touch with heaven. In the middle of the eighteenth century Jonathan Edwards issued such an appeal; and this led to that union of prayer, which played so significant a part in the origination of the great missionary societies. It was notably the effect of that appeal on Sutcliffe, Rylands, Fuller, and Carey, that led to the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society at the close of the eighteenth century.

It may be that a wave of prayer is again about to break over the Church. There are many signs of it. We hear Christian people saying on all hands that they want to get back to God; and surely it would be one of the most significant signs of the unity of the Church and the power of the Holy Spirit, if such a prayer wave were to lift us all on to a new level of intercession for the Church of God and the world around us. We need not wait for the Church to appoint.



*I will restore to you the years that the locust  
hath eaten.* *Joel ii. 25.*

HOW many years of our life have been consumed by the locust! Self in one form or another has sorely robbed us of our golden sheaves, reducing them to dust. Self-indulgence, frivolity, wanton spendthriftness of time, and talent, and opportunity, sloth and lethargy, mixed and evil motives, secret sins—what a crew are there! They have played the part of the caterpillar, the cankerworm, and the palmerworm with the green promise and the yellow produce of our lives.

But God waits to forgive; to put away from His mind the memory of the wasted past; to place the crown of a new hope upon our brow—yea, more, to restore to us the years that the locust hath eaten. There shall be a revenue of glory to Him even from those wasted years. Either in the experience they shall have communicated to us for dealing with other men, or in the penitential and broken-hearted temper they shall have begotten in ourselves; those years shall yet yield crops of praise to God, and of fruitfulness to us. And, also, God is prepared so to add His blessing to us, in the present and future, as to give us in each year not only the year's produce, but much more, so that each year will be laden and weighted with the blessing of three or four beside. Where sin abounded, grace shall much more abound. Where we have sown, we shall reap; not thirtyfold only, but a hundredfold. God is so anxious to give us as large a result as possible to show for our life's work, though we may have sadly wrecked its earlier portions. Did He not restore to Peter at Pentecost what he wasted in the hall of judgment? Did not Paul win harvests for Christ out of the years which preceded his conversion?

*I am the Lord your God, dwelling in Zion, My holy mountain.*

*Joel iii. 17.*

THIS will be the lot of the chosen people in the millennial age. The Holy God will make the city in which He resides a Holy place. But it is true universally. Wherever the Holy God dwells, there you have holiness—for it is the attribute of His nature, as heat is of fire. Holiness is not *It*, but *He*. Do you want *it*? Then you must invite *Him* to come.

When God comes into a day, it becomes holy unto Him. When His presence is revealed in a bush, it is holy ground. When He descends on a mountain, the fences are erected, that unhallowed feet may not draw nigh. When He fills a building like Solomon's Temple, the whole is consecrated, and may not be employed for sacrilegious purposes. Best of all, if He dwell in our hearts, they too are rendered holy to Himself.

When the apostle prays that the God of Peace should sanctify us wholly, he goes on to ask that spirit, soul, and body, should be as a temple filled with God. The holy man is he who is God-filled and God-possessed. It is not enough to possess God; we must be possessed by Him. He who has more of God is surely holier than other men; and he is the holiest who has most. Behold, Christ stands at the door and knocks: He longs to come in and abide, never again to depart; He brings with Him the holiness for which He has taught us to yearn.

"Is it true, Ignatius," said the Roman emperor to the Christian martyr, "that you carry about your God within you?" "It is even so," replied the bishop, "for it is written, I will dwell in thee, and walk in thee." And for that answer they cast him to the wild beasts. But what they deemed blasphemy is literally true of the Holy Spirit.

*The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa.*  
*Amos i. 1.*

GOD does not hesitate to employ a herdman, if only his heart is pure and devoted to His service. He calls such an one out at the midst of his fellows, designating him for His sacred ministry. And when the fire of God burns within, very common clay becomes luminous and transparent. An ox-goad, a ram's-horn, a sling of stone, will serve His purpose. It is not what a man has, but what he is, that matters.

As we look through this strong book of ancient prophecy, and notice how it abounds with references and imagery peculiar to a herdman's life, we feel that a noble spirit of devotion to God may elevate the meanest employments and dignify the most ordinary subjects. The common incidents of the farm may convey the Divine meaning not less than the sacred scenery of the Temple, which was familiar to Ezekiel. There is nothing which is intrinsically common or unclean. We profane things by a profane spirit. But if we view all things from the Divine standpoint, we shall find that a sacred light will beat through them, like that which transfigured the coarse garments of Christ so as no fuller on earth could whiten them. The glory streamed through from His heart !

It is comparatively seldom that God calls one of the upper classes of society to conspicuous usefulness. "Behold your calling, brethren, how that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called ; but God chose the weak things, . . . the base things, . . . and the things that are despised." Here and there a noble of great authority, a Zinzendorf, a Shaftesbury : but most often fishermen and publicans ; Luther, the miner's son, Ters-teegen the ribbon weaver, Carey the cobbler.

*Behold, I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves.* Amos ii. 13.

BEHOLD! This is like the hand which occurs in the margins of old books, to attract the reader's attention. It is God's special call to our heed.

Sin is very burdensome to God : especially the sins enumerated in the context. Look at the story of oppression in the 6th verse ; of licentiousness in the 7th ; of ingratitude in the 9th ; of drunkenness in the 12th. These sins are aggravated when committed by His own people. Just as the groaning wain creaks and cries out under its load, so does the heart of God under our sins. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!" Should not we feel more as God does in this respect? Ought not we to bear the burden of sin, as Daniel did for his land and people?

What a fulfillment these words had in the life and death of our blessed Lord! The sheaves of our sins were laid on Him : for the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all. As He bore His cross through the streets of Jerusalem ; as He lay crushed to the ground in Gethsemane ; as He cried, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"—surely He was like a laden wagon, groaning under an almost insupportable load.

The R. V. gives another sense, which is not so true to the Hebrew, but it should be considered : "I will press you, as a cart presseth" and cuts deep ruts in the road. A discovery is announced of a process of turning silver into gold by a pressure of eighty tons on a square inch, and in very low temperature. Yes, pressure and the chilling effects of presecution, difficulty, and disappointment are God's methods of redeeming us from destruction, and turning our silver into gold. Oh, let us forsake our sins rather than compel Him to employ such an ordeal!

*Can two walk together, except they be agreed?*

*Amos iii. 3.*

THIS is the first of seven searching questions, to each of which there is but one answer—*Certainly not.*

We are conducted, first, *to the forest*, to the lion's lair, where the roaring indicates that he has certainly secured his prey. There is a cause for those low roars of satisfaction. Then *to the moorland*, where the bird is suddenly entrapped. But there must have been an intention to entrap it on the part of the fowler, else it had not fallen to his hand. Lastly, *to the city*, where the panic-stricken crowds cower before some giant evil, such as pestilence, and tremble at the bugle-note of alarm. Here also, whether in the sounding of the trumpet, or the presence of the plague, there is an evident reason. Thus sorrow, causeless, does not come; and whenever it presses on the individual or the State, inquiry should be made whether God has any controversy with those who suffer beneath the stroke.

Often, in answer to the inquiry, it will be discovered that the soul is not in agreement with God; but at some almost imperceptible angle its metals have diverged from the main track of God's wise and holy procedure. And the trouble will remain until the nation or the individual has come back into agreement with God. It is worth our while to make any sacrifices, if only we may get back to God's side.

Whether in marriage, or business, or journeying together, be very sure that you are in perfect accord with your companion before you start. What sorrow might have been saved in thousands of cases, if only there had been stricter comparison of temperaments and methods before starting forth!

*Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.*

*Amos iv. 12.*

THESE words might have rung out in Paradise. When the heat of the day was over, the voice of the Lord might have been heard sounding down the leafy avenues: Prepare, O man, to meet thy God! And the summons must have filled him with ecstasy. As a child to its parent, so must those two innocent and happy beings have sped to their Creator.

We, too, hear the summons. Each morning, when we stand ready for the duties of the day, we hear the voice, Prepare to meet Me. Each Lord's Day we wake with this same summons in our heart, and prepare ourselves to meet our God. Each illness, each fluttering of the canvas of our mortality, each premonition of our end, takes up the same appeal, Prepare to meet God. And as we hear the words, we have no dread, no fear. Clothed in Christ's perfect righteousness, arrayed in His beauty, we know that we are accepted; that the love wherewith the Father loves the Son is waiting to greet us.

But there should be a preparedness of heart. We should not rush heedlessly into His presence. We should stimulate our hearts by thoughts like those suggested in the following verse. Stop and remember how great God is: He formed the mountains. How subtle His power: He made the viewless wind, and the Spirit of which it is the emblem. How omniscient His knowledge: He can declare unto man His inmost thought. How absolute His authority: the brightest morning will darken, or the darkest night brighten, as He bids. How vast the circuit of His providence, who steps from Alpine peak to peak. Let me not rush into His presence: He is my Father. But He is the Lord, the God of hosts: I must order my thoughts, and prepare to meet Him.



*Seek Him that maketh the Pleiades and Orion.*

*Amos v. 8 (R. V.).*

THIS chapter resounds with invitations to *seek* God. He makes the *Pleiades*, which usher in the *spring*: seek Him when life is full of radiant hope and promise, in days of love and joy. But He also makes *Orion*, the precursor of tempests; be sure, therefore, to seek Him when the sky is overcast and lowering, and when He presses you to enter the boat and face the storm.

He turns the shadow of death *into the morning*. Thank God for this. There is a turning of death-shadow into morning, when despair gives place to hope: when the dear one begins to revive from sore sickness; when circumstances begin to brighten; and when the perplexity and darkness of this mortal life, with its separations and misunderstandings, shall brighten with the eternal day. Weave thoughts of God into all these glad experiences; but not less so, when He makes the day dark with *night*. It may be that you will come closest to Him then; as the little child will sit on the far side of the railway carriage from her mother till they enter a tunnel, and then there will be a little startled cry and a rush to the mother's knee.

Sometimes the waters of the sea pour in on the land, engulfing the works of men, and devastating their toils. But amid all such scenes of desolation, the righteous have a secure hiding-place, suggested by the reference to the name Jehovah, with which this verse closes. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth unto it, and is safe."

"Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure;  
What entered into thee,  
That was, is, and shall be;  
Time's wheel runs back or stops—Potter and clay endure."



*Woe to them that are at ease in Zion !*

*Amos vi. 1.*

A PICTURE is given in the following chapters of the luxury and self-indulgence of the people. Stretched on couches inlaid with ivory, choosing the rarest dainties, accompanying their voices on the lute, and drinking wine from flowing bowls, they were indifferent to the wounds from which the national lifeblood was pouring. "They were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph" (ver. 6).

The same behavior is only too common amongst ourselves. Indeed, this temptation besets us all. If only we are well supplied with the comforts and luxuries of life, we are apt to become thoughtless of the miseries of poverty and misfortune. If our own heaven is secure, we are apt to enwrap ourselves with an atmosphere of satisfaction and composure, without taking sufficiently to heart the needs of the great world of sin and sorrow around.

"The affliction of Joseph" reminds us of the scene at the pit's mouth: how Joseph's brethren sat down to eat bread, whilst their brother was in the pit without water, and then sold him to the travelling merchantmen, to rid their sight of him. But human nature is prone to act thus in every age.

Are we at ease in Zion? Are we using for our own luxurious enjoyment gifts which God entrusted to our care for the world? Are we too indifferent to the fate of those who live in our homes, or pour in great streams of activity along our streets? Are we sleeping in the garden, whilst our Master sweats the bloody sweat? We have but one life to spend; let it be a life in earnest. Let us bethink ourselves of any whom we can help—any who are in affliction, the poor widow, the young wife with the sick husband, the student who is so eager to become a minister.

*The latter growth after the king's mowings.*  
*Amos vii. 1.*

OUR King has often to mow the grass of the inner life—the daisies and buttercups of experience of which we are so proud, the tall stalks, the flowering grasses. Were He to leave them, the entire growth would become altogether too coarse and rank for use. The lawn on which He loves to walk, with its velvet pile of grass, would become coarse and rough.

Mowing implies death. All the pretty flowers and myriads of blades lie in long swathes of death, presently to be carried away to the rubbish heap. From myriads of dying flowers the last expiring sigh is being breathed out on the soft spring breeze. We must be prepared to die to our complacent self-content; to our blissful frames and feelings; to our complaints and consolations—if any of them come between us and our King.

But after the King's mowings there is the *after-math*. It is said that the tenderest, juiciest shoots appear on lawns which are repeatedly mown. This is what the young lambs love, if they may taste it. And surely there is no such piety as that which follows on the repeated application of God's scythe. When repeated strokes have robbed us of health, friends, money, and favorable circumstances; then we put forth our tenderest shoots of love, and prayer, and consecration. Oh, do not be afraid of the scythe! The King loves thee too well to hurt thee. Be of good heart; thou shalt yet bear an aftermath!

"What do you think of your God now?" asked a well-known sceptic of Silwood of Keswick, who for twenty years suffered agonies. "Since He is able to keep me in perfect peace," was the reply, "amid sufferings like mine, I think of Him more than ever." Here was aftermath indeed!

*I will send a famine in the land, . . . of hearing the words of the Lord.*      *Amos viii. 11.*

ISRAEL will not listen to God's prophets, and their voices would be silenced. This was a just retribution. As they were not willing to have the word of God, so there should be a famine of that word. The word of God was precious in the days of Samuel, because there was no open vision; so should it be again. And perhaps this privation will one day be meted out to our beloved country. There is a much larger proportion of our population outside than inside our churches; and men proudly eschew God's Word. It may be that the message of the Gospel will almost cease from among them, and be replaced—as in so many instances is now the case—by the dry husks of morality and ceremonialism. Then they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.

We may question ourselves, whether we feed enough on God's Word. If we would grow strong, we must feed, not on condiments and sweetmeats, not on tit-bits and scraps, not on versicles and pious sentences; but on the strong meat of the Word, on the doctrines, histories, types of Scripture. Oh for more hunger and thirst for these! Would you have it so? No child will enjoy its meals who is constantly being surfeited with sweets between times. Beware lest you cloy your appetite with the painted sweetmeats of the world.

It is worth notice, that if men have not God, they will find some substitute. They will swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, Thy God, O Dan; thy manner, O Beersheba. This is why palmistry, spiritualism, so-called Christian science, are just now so much in vogue. Man's nature is made for God, and hungers for a substitute.

*In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen.* *Amos ix. 11, 12.*

THESE verses were quoted by the grave, white-vestured James in that memorable gathering of the Church to consider the admission of the Gentiles on equal terms with Jews (Acts. xv.). It is well worth noticing the special turn which the Lord's brother gave to the closing words of the quotation. He reads into it the deeper meaning of the Holy Spirit. The quickening and blessing of the chosen people has always meant the blessing of the world.

It was so, as James says, at Pentecost. The blessing which descended on the hill of Zion passed to all lands. They went everywhere preaching the Gospel, until some began to utter it also to the men of Antioch, and great numbers streamed into the Church (Acts xi.); and thence the widening circles broadened out, until Ephesus, Athens, Rome, and distant Spain and Britain were included.

So will it be when the end of the present age has been reached. We, the Church, shall sit with Christ in the heavenlies, occupying the place now held by the devil and his demons, who will no longer be the prince of the power of the air; but the Jews, using that term in its strict sense, having been brought to God, shall be the evangelists and apostles of the world. Then the residue of the Gentiles shall seek unto the Lord. Ponder, specially, the promises of 13th, 14th, and 15th verses; and compare them with Rom. xi. 15, 24, 26.

May we not appropriate them in a spiritual sense, and ask that the days may hasten when the crops shall have no sooner fallen before the sickle, than the plowmen shall run their shares through the clods; and the vintage shall follow close on the harvest; and men shall be prepared and eager before we begin to speak!

*The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.*  
*Obadiah 17.*

AS long as Edom invaded and annoyed the house of Jacob, the people were unable to possess their possessions in peace. No sooner did the harvest or vintage appear, than their hereditary foes swooped down to carry off the fruits of their toils. But Edom's dominion was to be ended; and then there would be no cloud in the sky, no barrier to their uninterrupted joy.

There are many instances of people not possessing their possessions. Such are those who put their plate and valuables into furniture depositories, and for years leave them to neglect; who have shelves of unread, uncut books; who do not realize that coal and iron mines lie under their estates; who never enjoy the wealth of love and tenderness in their friends' hearts; who refuse to avail themselves of resources which are well within their reach.

But too many of God's people are like this. The Father has caused all His fullness to reside in the nature of Jesus; He hath given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness in Him; He hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus; in our Saviour are treasures of wisdom, of purity, of prevailing power, of love and patience. The Divine Merchantman has come to us to give us gold tried in the fire, white raiment, and eyesalve. But we go blundering on in our own selfish, sinful, faltering way. We do not possess our possessions. We do not call into practical use the boundless reinforcements awaiting us, at every hour, within the tiniest beckoning of our faith. We are like the manufacturer who refuses to use the steam-power, though it is laid on into the mill; or the householder who refuses to touch the button of the electric light.

*Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.*

*Jonah i. 3.*

*HE went down to Joppa.*—Sin is always a going down. Down from the heights of fellowship with God ; down from the life of high and noble purpose ; down from self-restraint and high endeavor. Yes, and we know we are going down ; that our self-discipline is relaxed ; that our holy separation from the world is slacker.

*He found a ship.*—Opportunity does not necessarily indicate either expediency or duty. Because the ship happened at that moment to be weighing anchor and the sails to be filled with a favoring breeze, Jonah might have argued that his resolution was a right one. Whether he did or not, there are many times in our lives when we are disposed to argue that favoring circumstances indicate the right course. But it must be remembered that they never can belie God's summons to the soul to do His will. The court of conscience is the supreme court of appeal ; and to run away from known duty cannot be right, though circumstances seem at first to smile.

*He paid the fare thereof.*—Yes, if we go opposite to God's will, we always have to pay for it. The loss of self-respect, the broken piece of conscience, the deprivation of God's blessed presence, are part of the fare. And even when we have paid and lost it all, we fail to get what we purchased ; we are dropped out of our chosen vessel in mid-ocean ; and God brings us back to land at His own expense, and in a ship of His own construction. The morning may be fine, but it is soon overcast : the sky may be clear at starting, but God sends a great storm after the runaways to bring them back to Himself : the ship may seem to be opportunely leaving the wharf, but disaster will overtake it.



*I am cast out from before Thine eyes ; yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple.*

*Jonah ii. 4 (R. V.).*

THAT is well, O truant soul. *Look again ! from where thou art.* Thou art in the heart of the seas ; the flood of sorrow enwraps thee ; storms of trouble are sweeping over thee—but look again toward His holy temple. All that sorrow has been sent to bring thee back from thy wanderings, and cause thee to look again. Thou couldst not look so long as thy back was toward the will of God, and thy face toward Tarshish ; but now thou art turned again, and art on thy way back, thou mayest look again in the direction of the altar and its sacrifice, the High Priest and His mediation. Look again. Look off unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of Faith. Do not wait till thou hast come into a better vantage-point for vision, but look again from thy position in the lowest depths.

*Look again ! God invites thee, too.* Though thou hast turned thy back on Him these many years, He waits to be gracious ; His face is wreathed in tenderest, yearning love. One look the least, the most abashed, from the greatest distance, will be eagerly noticed and instantly reciprocated. “They looked unto Him and were lightened”—so wilt thou be. And He will bring up thy life from the pit. Does thy soul faint within thee?—then remember the Lord. Let there be but one yearning desire for Him, and it will come in unto Him as a prayer to His holy temple.

*Look again ! in spite of the remonstrances of thine heart.* “I said.” The heart is always saying : I am too vile ; I have sinned too deeply ; I have gone too far ; I have so often fallen and returned, I am ashamed to come again : besides, are there not texts about never forgiveness, and impossible to renew to repentance ? *I said : Yet, look again !*



*The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time.*  
*Jonah iii. 1.*

WE must not presume on this, but we may take it to our hearts for their very great comfort. God's word may come to us "the second time." Jonah evaded it the first time; but he was permitted to have a second opportunity of obeying it. Thus it was with Peter; he failed to realize the Lord's ideal in the first great trial of his apostolic career, but the Lord met him on the shores of the lake, and His word came to him a second time.

God is not waiting to notice our first failure and thrust us from His service. He waits, with eager desire, to give us the joy and honor of being fellow laborers with Himself. He waits to be gracious. Therefore, when in our madness, we refuse to do His bidding, and rush off in another direction, He brings us back, amid bitter experiences, and says, "Go again to Nineveh with the message that I gave thee originally."

How many times He will do this I do not dare to say. He forgives indefinitely, unto seventy times seven; but how often He will reëntrust the sacred message and mission, it is not for me to say. But there is, without doubt, a limit beyond which He cannot go, lest our own character suffer, and the interests of other souls, who may be dissuaded from obedience by our example, should be imperilled.

How wonderful it is that God should employ us at all! Yet it is like His work in nature. He is ever calling men to coöperate with Himself. He lays the coal up in mines, but man must excavate: He puts the flowers in the wilds, but man cultivates them: He gives the water, but man irrigates the fields. So He longs over Nineveh, but summons sinful men to carry His word.

## *The Lord prepared.*

*Jonah iv. 6, 7, 8.*

THIS book is full of this word *prepared*. We are told that the Lord prepared a great fish, a gourd, a worm, and a sultry east wind.

*He prepares the fish* (chap. i. 17).—When we are at our wits' end, apparently going to destruction, He interposes and arrests our progress, and brings us back again to Himself.

*He prepares the gourd*, that it may come up to be a shadow to our heads, and deliver us from our evil case. The gourd of friendship, of property, of some cherished and successful achievement. Ah, how glad we are for these gourds; though not always sufficiently quick to attribute them to the loving providence of our Heavenly Father.

*He prepares the worm, and the east wind*.—Jonah would have regarded Nineveh's destruction with equanimity, whilst he mourned over his gourd; and there was no way of awakening him to the true state of the case than by letting worm and east wind do their work. He must be taught that what the gourd was to himself, Nineveh was to God. Yea, it was more; because God had labored for it, and made it to grow through long centuries (ver. 11).

How often our gourds are allowed to perish, to teach us these deep lessons. In spite of all we can do to keep them green, their leaves turn more and more sere and yellow, until they droop and die. And when they lie prone in the dust, the east wind is let forth from the Almighty hand—the malign breath from which the gourd would have delivered us. O child of God, fainting in the east wind, do not ask to die; but get thee to the blue misty shadow of the great Rock in a weary land; to the Man who is a shadow from the heat.

*The mountains shall be molten under Him, and the valleys shall be cleft.* *Micah i. 4.*

WE must stay to admire the sublimity of these words. Of course, it is a very human way of describing the movements of the Eternal: but how forcibly the prophet's words suggest the interest of God in human life. He comes out of His place to deliver His own, and to judge the ungodly: to remove obstacles to the fulfillment of His purposes.

Are you looking out to-day on a range of mountains that block your passage and screen off the rays of the sun? Do your difficulties seem to have accumulated till they act as insuperable obstacles to the fulfillment of your most cherished purposes? Perhaps, divided from your friends; hemmed and blocked in from the fair sunny lands of the vineyard and the goldening corn; despairing of tunnelling or scaling the Himalaya and the Alps. It is a sad and drear prospect, enough to daunt the most courageous spirit, and break down the most heroic courage. But look again at this text.

“Behold, the Lord cometh forth out of His place. He steps forth from His pavilion, intent on some great and glorious project. He treads on thy high mountains as on the furrows of a ploughed field. They are nothing to Him. Beneath His tread the mountains melt, and the valleys cleave. Wax melting before the fire is the simple but sublime image of the instant subsidence of whole ranges of difficulty. Wilt thou not walk with Him? Dare to believe that He can make His mountains a way. Who art thou, great mountain before Zerubbabel? Thou shalt become a plain.

“For whom the heart of man shuts out,  
Sometimes the heart of God shuts in;  
And fences them all round about  
With silence 'mid the world's loud din.”

*The breaker is gone up before them.*

*Micah ii. 13 (R. V.).*

THE mind of the prophet conceives of the people as captives in a foreign city, surrounded by lofty walls and frowning gates. Like impassable barriers, these lie between them and liberty. There seems no hope of their being able to break forth; but all suddenly a Breaker appears, who, summoning them to follow, breaks through the opposition of armed men and of mighty bulwarks. With resistless might, He breaks His way through; and they that follow Him are described as having broken forth, and passed on to the gate, and gone out thereat. First the Lord, then their king, and then hosts of men.

No finer description could be imagined of the resurrection, which we celebrate as the first day of every week recurs. Looking forth from heaven at the mystery of the resurrection, when the triumphant Lord stepped forth from the restraint of watch, and ward, and stone, and demon hate, and the grim fortress of the grave, the angels might fitly have appropriated these words, "The Breaker is gone up" before His redeemed ones. See! they too are breaking forth, and passing on through the gate—their King passing on before them.

This is also true of every new era of time and novelty of circumstance. Circumstances, like prison walls, may confine us; but our Breaker is always preceding us, breaking down opposition and strong ramparts of apparently impassable difficulty; breaking down the suspicion and hatred of men; breaking down the mailed force of hell. Keep close beside Him, as the armor-bearer behind Jonathan. Let there be no perceptible interspace. The iron gate of the city will open of its own accord, through which you shall pass into perfect liberty.

*I truly am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord.*  
*Micah iii. 8.*

NOTHING needs more of the Spirit of God than the preaching which declares to men their sins. No one is so thoroughly hated as the candid friend. Just because conscience attests the truth of our utterances, the soul of the sinner repents our plain speaking. You may condemn sin generally as much as you like; but when your hand comes near the broken bone, or the diseased flesh, then there is at once a violent outcry. Nothing is more needed in the present day than particular preaching, the careful analysis of motive, the discrimination of shades of wrongdoing; but the ministry of John the Baptist is only possible to those who come in the spirit and power of Elijah.

We need *power* like that with which the apostles gave witness to Jesus Christ. And it is not difficult to discern when a man is dealing with sin in the power of the eternal God. We need *judgment* to detect graver and lighter offences, and trace the connection between sin and its consequence. We need *might* to withstand the opposition we shall inevitably meet.

But all these may be had with the filling of the Holy Ghost, which is the privilege and right of every child of God in this the age of the Holy Ghost. Our ascended Lord received of the Father the fullness of the Spirit, that He might communicate Him to all who believe; but we, in our turn, must receive. Do not be content with a few drops at the bottom of the bucket; ask to stand always beneath the flowing spring and be filled. The disciples were filled suddenly on the day of Pentecost; but they were being filled perpetually (Acts xiii. 52, *Gr.*). The fullness of God for you is only limited by your capacity to receive.

*In the latter days it shall come to pass.*

*Micah iv. 1 (R. V.).*

THESE words are repeated in Isa. ii. 2-4. The holy men that wrote the Bible lived upon the inspired words of their predecessors. Amid the dark night this promise of God shone like binary stars.

No doubt they have been fulfilled in the Gospel dispensation. In a deep and true sense it has come to pass that the Lord's house has been established in the top of the mountains, and has been exalted above the hills. The Church is a conspicuous and influential object among the forces of the world; and peoples are flowing toward it. In very many cases whole nations have flung away the religion of their ancestors, and gathered within that Christian temple which has been built upon the foundations of Judaism. Out of Zion there has gone forth the law; and from Jerusalem the Word of the Lord. In Jesus, the Jew is still the centre of the world's vision.

But the full accomplishment of these words waits behind the curtain that is so soon to be rent at the coming of our Lord. Then holy influences will proceed from the chosen people who shall have been led to recognize Christ as their Messiah. From these the Gospel shall go forth unto all the world. Beneath the hallowing influences of that age swords shall be beaten into ploughshares, and spears into pruning hooks; the cannon shall be as obsolete as the tomahawk; the explosives of war shall be stored in museums; whilst schools for training the art of war shall be used as missionary seminaries.

There shall be no war, because there shall be no fear. "None shall make them afraid." And there shall be no fear, because universal love shall reign toward God and man.



*And this Man shall be our Peace.*

*Micah v. 4, 5 (R. V.).*

HE that comes from Bethlehem Ephratah, leaving a trail of light that conducts the eyes of all generations back to the little village, "the least amongst the thousands of Judah," is the Everlasting Jehovah, whose goings forth have been from of old.

What *majesty* is His ! He shall stand amid the swirling waves of change, the shifting quicksands of time, and the drifting cloudwrack of revolution ; erect, unchangeable, unmovable. And not He alone, but His flock which has gathered around Him out of the windy storm and tempest. No common majesty mantles that gentle form ; it is the majesty of the Name of Jehovah, the glory that He had with the Father before the worlds were.

What *tenderness* is His ! He feeds His flock like a shepherd, and gathers the lambs in His arm. Though He is great to the ends of the earth, He is the Prince of Peace. He makes peace ; does His work calmly and tenderly ; lays the foundations of peace by yielding His life to the death of the Cross without resistance or complaint.

What *strength* is His ! Strong with the original strength of Deity, with the acquired strength of perfect obedience, with the strength that accrues from the successful prevalence over His foes. His strength is ours, because He loves us perfectly ; and it is the boast of the strong to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to seek its own.

*And this Man is our Peace.*—He came and preached Peace to them that were far off, and Peace to them that were nigh. He has made Peace by the Blood of His Cross. He is the Prince of Peace to loyal and loving hearts. He sheds abroad in our hearts His own Peace, which the world cannot take away.



*Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God?*  
*Micah vi. 8.*

THE perfunctory sacrifices of lambs and rams, rivers of oil, and of tender children, were eagerly practiced by the surrounding nations, such as the Moabites, but were abhorrent to God. What to Him is the outward rite without the holy purpose; the child's form of obeisance, apart from filial love! Grave questionings as to the utility of mere ritualism suggested themselves in the old-world religions. It appears that the questions of this chapter were put by Balaam; and the words before us were uttered by the Divine Spirit to his heart. But however that may be, it is matter for our adoring gratitude that God has stepped out of the infinite to show us what is good, and what He requires.

*To do justly* is to preserve the balance of strict equity: if an employer, treating work-people with perfect justice; if a manufacturer or salesman, making and selling what will thoroughly satisfy the just requirements of the purchaser; if an employee, giving an exact equivalent of time and diligence and conscientious labor for money received.

*To love mercy* is to take into consideration all those drawbacks which misfortunes, which enfeebled health, or crushing sorrow may impose on those who owe us service or money, or in some other way are dependent upon us.

*To walk humbly with God* implies constant prayer and watchfulness, familiar yet humble converse, conscientious solicitude, to allow nothing to divert us from His side or to break the holy chain of conversation. We must exchange our monologue, in which we talk with ourselves, for dialogue, in which we talk as we walk with God. Ask Him to make these good things the ordinary tenor of your life.

*Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy : when  
I fall, I shall arise.* *Micah vii. 8.*

THOU art glad, O child of the darkness, that the child of God has fallen into the pit: thou laughest derisively and in scorn. But wait to see the end of the Lord, for He is very pitiful. Thy rock is not as our Rock, and of this thou shalt be the judge. Our God will chastise with many stripes those of His children who persist in wrongdoing. He will withdraw the light of His face. He will permit the backslider to bear His indignation. But He does not keep His anger forever, or allow the enemy and avenger to wreak all His vengeance. He may use the stripes of the children of men to a certain point; but immediately they exceed it, and take unhallowed license, He steps in and delivers His beloved, enabling the returning and restored soul to use these words.

Wait, O soul; thy God will presently arise to plead thy cause, and execute judgment for thee; do not put forth thine hand to save thyself; wait on Him, He will deliver thee; He will bring thee forth to the light, and thou shalt behold His righteousness in the ordering of thy life. Only acknowledge thy sin; cast thyself on His mercy; and accept what He may appoint by way of chastening.

What an exquisite word is here for those who sit in darkness from any cause: from the waning of human love; the darkening of increasing physical weakness; the withdrawal of beloved faces, one by one, from the family circle. Look unto the Lord; wait for the God of your salvation; when you sit in darkness, He will be a light.

"In darkest shades, if He appear,  
My dawning is begun;  
He is my soul's sweet morning star,  
And He my rising sun."

*The Lord hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm.*

*Nahum i. 3.*

*GOD'S dealings are often terrible.*—He rides on the whirlwind, and wraps Himself in the storm. But the child of God looks beneath the dress to the Father's heart, which beats with as much love when attired thus as when arrayed in the smiles of a summer eve. The whirlwind serves a useful purpose in cleaning the trees of rotten boughs, and searching the corners of foetid courts; the storm, in deluging the gulleys and drains; the clouds, in forming the fertilizing showers on the thirsty land. God is in it all. God is behind the tempests that sweep over and desolate your life: this is His way; and the clouds that overcast your sky are the pavement of His feet; on our side they seem dark and lowering; but on the other side they are like burnished gold, as He steps across them. Whenever clouds are above, remember that God is at hand. They are the dust of His feet.

*God's way is generally hidden.*—The clouds as dust conceal Him; but we must not dwell with melancholy foreboding on the clouds, as if they were all. God is behind them, working for us, coming to our rescue, showing Himself strong on our behalf. Whenever the clouds gather over your life, say God cannot be far off—see, the dust He raises in His mighty progress betrays Him.

*God counts our great things as very trifling.*—A cloud is a great thing to us; it sometimes seems to equal the Alps in magnificence, in height, in girth; but to God it is only as a grain of dust to us. Our difficulties, perplexities, and anxieties, are very little things to Him. With one movement of His hand He could sweep them away, as you can move dust-motes from your table. Trust Him! Your tears are much to Him; your difficulties nothing.

*The Lord bringeth again the excellency of Jacob.*

*Nahum ii. 2 (R. V.).*

TOO long Nineveh had exerted her malign influence upon the fortunes of the chosen people ; that, to use the expressive simile of the eleventh verse, it had resembled a den of lions, whence ravenous beasts prowl forth to devour the villagers. The Assyrians, pouring forth from their mighty metropolis, had devastated the excellency of Jacob, the cry of the land had gone up to Jehovah ; and He here declares His determination to quell the enemy and avenger, and to bring again the excellency of the people whom He loved.

It may be that you, too, have been carried into captivity, or devastated by strongly besetting sins ; though you pray and yearn for emancipation, still you are kept low by the depredations of the power of evil. But be of good cheer ; God is moving to your help. He is against those who are against you ; He will bring again your excellency. He resembles the mother, whose child is smitten with smallpox. Does she love it less ? Nay, but comes nearer, that they may fight the disease together.

You shall excel in *faith* when the hindrance is removed. The faith that once characterized you shall arouse with its former vigor, and make an open pathway down which heaven's best blessings may enter your life. At its summons the unseen will become more real than the seen, and God will be all in all. You shall excel also in *hope*. This is the realizing faculty, accepting the assurances of faith, following them as the beacon-lights that guide weary sailors ; for hope is more than faith, as the artist is more than the preparer of colors. You shall also excel in *love*. When self-will looses its hold upon the soul, love springs spontaneously from its soil.

*There is no assuaging of thy hurt ; thy wound is grievous.*

*Nahum iii. 19 (R. V.).*

THIS is one of the greatest chapters in Old Testament prophecy. Nahum the Elkoshite was a man of uncommon power of imagination and force of eloquence. His denunciation of Nineveh is remarkably forcible and eloquent. You can almost hear the crack of the whip, the rattling of wheels, and see the heap of corpses that block the passages. Every traveller, from Layard downward, has attested the literal fulfillment of these predictions. For Nineveh, from the time of her fall to the present, has been utterly waste. Her hurt has never been assuaged. A scar upon the earth's surface alone marks her site.

From such a spectacle we may well turn to our beloved country, and seriously question whether we are doing all that we can to stay a similar fate. There are many signs that she is being swept along in the same stream as has borne many mighty nations down to ruin. The growing luxury of the rich ; the abject poverty of the poor (a child was burned in Whitechapel the other day through the mother having to sell the fire-guard to buy bread) ; the gross impurity and immorality of our streets ; the increasing desecration of the Rest Day ; and the overwhelming bill for drink—these things cannot be unpunished. May we not indeed fear that God will soon rise against us ? Let us use our influence as citizens, and our prayer as saints, to avert a fate which if it comes will be irretrievable.

Ah, reader, is this thy case ? Hast thou an inward hurt, of which no balm or medicine has brought assuagement ? Hast thou a wound, so grievous that no art has sufficed to heal it ? Take it to the Living Saviour. Each of His miracles, in the days of His flesh, has a spiritual counterpart still.

*Art not Thou from everlasting, O Lord my God?  
Thou diest not.* *Hab. i. 12. (R. V., marg.).*

NOTE the attributes of God, which are enumerated in these words. His eternity—He is from everlasting; He is the Holy One—of purer eyes than to behold evil; the Almighty—the Rock. Is it not wonderful that mortals should be permitted to put the possessive pronoun before these wonderful words, and claim this glorious God for themselves! *My God; mine Holy One.*

But the most remarkable is the reading suggested above by the words, “Thou diest not”; “He only hath immortality.” Time cannot lay its hand upon His nature, or death dissolve it. His hair is white, but not with the whiteness of decay, but of unutterable purity. He need not tremble at the summons of man’s great last foe. Unchangeable! The same yesterday, to-day, and forever! The death of death! The destruction of the grave! He dies not.

All this is true; but it is true also that in the person of his Eternal Son He died. He laid down His life, though none took it from Him. He bowed His glorious nature beneath the yoke of death. Because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He took part in the same, that through death He might destroy death. Though He ever liveth, yet He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.

There are many mysteries like those at which the prophet hints. He holds his peace whilst the wicked swallows up the man that is more righteous than himself. It is the problem of all ages why God should permit it; but whatever be the explanation, it cannot be because He has vacated the throne of the universe, or that His arm is weakened by disease. From everlasting to everlasting He is God.



*I will look forth to see what He will speak with me.*

*Hab. ii. 1 (R. V.).*

THE prophet had made his complaint in the preceding chapter; and now he climbs the watch-tower, much as the watchman did who waited for tidings of the battle between Joab and Absalom. He looks forth for God's answer. This, to say the least, is respectful in our dealings with the Almighty. Too often we ask questions, and do not wait for replies; shoot prayer-arrows into the air, without stopping to see where they alight, or what quarry they strike. We are in too great a hurry, to take time and trouble for climbing the water-tower, and awaiting the Divine reply.

God still speaks to the waiting soul. Sometimes, there is a direct answer to its perplexity; at others, there is the assurance that the vision is yet for the appointed time, but that it is hastening toward the end. O long-waiting soul, dost thou hear those words? Thou hast been standing long upon the watch-tower. Hope has almost died; but the vision is panting in its haste to be fulfilled. If it tarry, wait for it; because it is already on the way. Every throb of the pendulum brings it nearer. The express train is hurrying toward thee, with its precious freight.

How often God's answers come, and find us gone! We have waited for awhile, and, thinking there was no answer, we have gone our way; but as we have turned the first corner the post has come in. God's ships touch at our wharves; but there is no one to unload them. His letters lie at the office; but no one calls for them. It is not enough to direct your prayer unto God; look up, and look out, until the blessing alights on your head. When we ask what is according to His will, we receive while we pray.



*O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years.*  
*Hab. iii. 2.*

WHEN we are oppressed with the state of the Church and the world, as Habakkuk was, there is no resource but to turn to God. It is of no use to say to our brother, "What shall *we* do?" Better at once get into the presence of the Almighty. All conferences with flesh and blood are wasted breath, unless there has been a previous one with God.

Note also the *unselfishness* of the prayer which precedes revival. We must not pray "Revive *my* work," lest the insidious temptation come in of using the stream of God's blessing to turn our own tiny water-wheels for our own profit. Let us get beyond the narrow limits of our church or section, and ask for a revival of *God's* work everywhere.

We do not need a new Gospel, but a *revival*—a revivifying of the old Gospel. If any preach another Gospel than that which the apostles preached, let him be accursed; he is selling bran for wheat; he is filling cartridges with sand. We want nothing but the Gospel of the Cross of Jesus Christ, proclaimed from lips which have received a new baptism of heavenly power.

Note the *time*. Not at the *end* of years, but in the *midst*. This is a prayer for those in middle life. They are apt to think that their power for service has passed its prime, and that the successes of their early days cannot be paralleled. But let them remember that in the midst of the years God can revive His work, and ask for it.

What *an argument*! "Remember mercy." We cannot appeal to *merit*, but can lay great stress on *mercy*. Lord, have mercy on Thy Church—revive her; and ere the dispensation close, may she arise for one great work of soul-salvation!

*I will search Jerusalem with candles.*

*Zeph. i. 12.*

THE state of things in the chosen city was scandalous. The people worshipped the host of heaven on the housetops ; the temple-courts were filled with the priests of idolatry ; the court affected foreign dress and manners. Nothing could prevent the invasion of the Chaldeans as ministers of the Divine vengeance. These were the terrible guests whom the Almighty had summoned to the feast ; and the feast consisted of the spoils of the city (ver. 7).

No sin of His people can escape the notice of God. He searches out the secret evils of our hearts with lighted candles, not for His vision alone, but for ours ; that we may know, and abhor them, and put them from us. There is the *candle of conscience*. The spirit of man is as the candle of the Lord. In some men the candle is present, but not lit : in others it is lit by the power of the Divine Spirit ; and there is something of the incandescent flame about it then.

There is *the candle of outward events*. How often does God allow some incident of which we hear in social conversation, or read in the newspaper, to cast a sudden and unexpected light upon some passages in our lives which we have carefully shrouded in darkness. Right into a hidden closet the searchlight falls, saying " thou art the man."

Then there is that *candle of His Holy Word*. A text or sermon unkindled by the Spirit of God is like an unlighted candle. But when God's Holy Spirit rests on it, interfusing it with fire, then how mighty is its effect ! It searches the heart and tries the reins ; it reveals to man his thought and the real object of his existence, that he may repent.

*It may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.*  
*Zeph. ii. 3.*

THE name of this prophet means, "Whom God hides or protects." The hidden man invites others to his hiding-place; and shows how we may be hidden in the day of God's anger. It is said that in the centre of the wildest cyclone there is a point of absolute calm: so amid the wildest storms that have swept the face of the world there have always been some of God's hidden ones:—

"The secret place, the refuge from the blast,  
The glorious Temple, Lamb of God art Thou;  
Our *feet* shall tread the golden courts at last,  
Our *souls* have entered now."

"I cannot deny," writes Tersteegen, "the corruptions of the external Church; but I think my dear friend has more necessary things to attend to. Within! Within! With God alone!" There is truth here, though not all the truth. We must have Elijahs as well as Zephaniahs.

Only those may know the hidden life who fulfill the conditions here described. They must be *meek*; they must *work His judgment*; they must *seek righteousness and meekness*. It is the soul that bends before the blast of the terrible ones; that gives place to wrath, not because of pusillanimity, but because of the fear of the Lord; that hands over its cause of alarm and fear to the Most High, which abides in His secret place, and hides under His shadow.

Let us seek these things, and then there will be no *may-be* in our being hidden. We shall certainly be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger; hidden in the wounds of Jesus, hidden in His heart, hidden in God with Christ, hidden in the fiery glory of His intolerable holiness.

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee!"

*The Lord thy God is in the midst of thee, a Mighty One who will save.* Zeph. iii. 17 (R. v.).

IF this announcement is compared with the foregoing verse, it becomes apparent that only those may take its blessed comfort who have made the Lord their King. It is when the Lord, the King of Israel, is in the midst that we cease to fear the incursion of evil. Entire surrender and consecration must precede that deliverance from the power of evil which we all desire in our holiest hours.

O tempted one, who fearest every hour because of the fury of the foe, that seems only waiting to destroy, look no longer upon Him, but behold thy glorious Lord. "*He will save.*" Dare to repeat those words again and again, as a sweet refrain. Dare to believe that the battle is not yours, but His. Fear not; nor let thine hands be slack! Do thy work in the world, and let God keep thee.

But God will do more than save the yielded trusting one. *He will rejoice* over the soul that finds its all in Himself. Such exquisite satisfaction will fill His glorious nature, that it shall be as when the heart can no longer contain itself, and wells over with liquid music. It is much to hear a nightingale sing; more to hear an angel; more to hear some child of Adam redeemed from sin sing the new song: but most to hear the great God break out into song. So a mother sings over her babe. O my God, may my life give Thee joy; not grief, nor tears, but a song.

But He does not always express Himself thus. He is sometimes "silent in His love." At such times He does not speak or sing, but broods over the soul that has dared to trust Him. "*He will rest in His love.*" There are times when the heart is too full of blessedness to speak—it has learned to abide in the secret place. An ocean too full to permit of waves!

*He that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.* Hag. i. 6.

IN these words, spoken on their return from captivity, God remonstrates with His people for neglecting the rebuilding of His house, and indicates this as the reason for the failure of their crops, and the profitlessness of their labors. They seemed to put their hard-earned wages into a bag with holes.

How true a description of many in the present day! They work hard, but derive little comfort from their toils. Their homes are bare; their children unkempt; their circumstances meagre. They are always in anxiety. Gambling, drinking, loose and evil company—are indeed bags with holes. But there are other analogies. We sometimes find our days slipping away without accomplishing anything worth mentioning. We have nothing to show for them—nothing accomplished, nothing done. Or we expend time and thought on plans that are apparently well and carefully devised, but they prove abortive and disappointing. All this is like a laborer putting his wages into a bag with holes, and when he reaches home he has nothing to show for his labor.

There is a reason for this loss and failure. What applied to the Jews on their return from captivity, applies still. We have not placed God first. We have run every man to his own house, while His house has lain waste. We have worked from the wrong base of operations. We have not made first things first. If we do not trust in the Lord with all our heart, but lean to our own understanding; if in all our ways we do not acknowledge Him; if our eyes are not single to His interests, we need not be surprised when He calls for a drought upon the land. Let us consider our ways, and amend them.

*The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former.*

*Hag. ii. 8, 9 (R. V.).*

THE new Temple was deficient in the splendid adornment which Solomon had lavished on the first. Neither gold, nor silver, nor precious stone garnished its bare walls. But Haggai says that this lack was not due to any failure in the resources of Israel's God. The silver and the gold were His; and if He had chosen He could have poured them without stint into the lap of His people. But He purposely withheld them, that their attention might not be distracted from the spiritual glory which was to make the second Temple more famous than the lavished gold of Parvaim. The latter glory of this house, or the glory of this latter house, shall be greater, saith the Lord of Hosts; and then, as though to indicate that the glory was to be moral and spiritual, the Divine voice adds, "And in this place will I give peace."

Dear child of God, it has pleased thy Heavenly Father to withhold from thee both gold and silver. Thou has just enough to live on, but that is all. With the apostle thou sayest, "Silver and gold have I none." God could have done otherwise for thee; for the silver and gold are His. But He purposely abstained lest thy head should be lifted up; lest thy attention should be so absorbed by these things as to neglect the sure riches; lest the radiance of thy faith, which is more precious than gold tried in the fire, or the beauty of thy meek and quiet spirit, should be obscured by the tawdry sheen of earth's metals.

But peace, and righteousness, and meek humility, are of everlasting work. Cultivate these; let thy life be a Temple whose glory is the indwelling of God; expect that the Desire of all nations should make thee His home, and shine through thee to others.



*He stood among the myrtle-trees that were in the bottom.*

*Zech. i. 8.*

THE myrtle in the lowland vale is a beautiful emblem of the people of God. They do not aspire to be forest trees, but are content to fill a little space if He be glorified. As the myrtle seeks its home in shady and moist lands, so the believer needs shadow and moisture. God's ideal for us is a lowly plant, fragrant in scent, and graceful in its appearance.

But, however lowly and humble the myrtle might be, the Angel of Jehovah, who could have been none other but the Lord Jesus Himself, was there. At dead of night the prophet beheld Him sitting on a red horse, and attended by a retinue of horsemen, who had come back to Him after walking to and fro in all the earth. The Lord has His throne in the midst of His people, and His servants post over sea and land to do His bidding on their behalf.

And thus the prophet overheard the colloquy. The Lord's inquiry and the Angel's answer were clearly distinguished. He also heard the appeal made by the Redeemer of Israel to the Eternal, as He pleaded that God would avenge His people's cause, and was answered with good and comforting words. The Angel Jehovah who pleaded for Israel (ver. 12) still pleads for His Church: and is similarly answered.

Yes! we are the objects of divine solicitude. Jesus with His bright angels is on our side. Not more really was He with the disciples of old, who were but as myrtles, than He is with us. He is still displeased with those who invade our lives with their cruelties. He is jealous for His people with a great jealousy. He will yet comfort Zion, and choose Jerusalem. However dark your night, dare to believe that the Lord of the Angels has stooped to your myrtle-tree life to help and bless.



*I will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and the glory in the midst of her.*                      *Zech. ii. 5.*

JERUSALEM was to be rebuilt ; but it would soon outgrow the narrow boundaries of the walls which Nehemiah and Ezra had reared with so much care. The multitude of men and cattle would pour over the ramparts as villages spread themselves out over the open country. What then : would there be no wall to arrest the foe and preserve the inhabitants from attack ? Yes ; there would be one, because the presence of God would be as a wall of fire round about. Nor would this be all, because He would be the glory in the midst (Isaiah iv. 5).

How busy some of us are in building walls to our lives—the walls of property ; of family alliances ; of preparation against all kinds of ill. But the utmost we can do is not enough to defend us against the inevitable perils and dangers of our mortal life. Better far is it to hide within the enfolding, encouraging presence of the Eternal God, which is as a rampart of fire. Can plague or pestilence pass through fire ? Travellers light a cordon of fires to surround them with their protection from tigers and wolves : so the soul hides in God. Notice the exquisite similitude—we are safe as “ the apple of His eye.” What a safe environment is furnished by the brows, lids, lashes, strong frontal bones, and lachrymal water to cleanse each defect. We raise the arm at once to protect the eye. So safe art thou, O weak believer !

But we need not defence only, but illumination ; not the fire around alone, but within ; not deliverance, but salvation. Where can this be obtained, save in the indwelling of the Son of God, making our hearts so full of His burning purity that sin might be abashed and no sacrilegious foot intrude ?

*A brand plucked out of the fire.*

*Zech. iii. 2.*

SUCH is the divine economy, that God makes much of brands, fragments, castaways. What others regard as unworthy of their heed is dear and priceless to the great Lover of souls. The smoking flax, the bruised reed, the woman that was a sinner, the dying thief, the brand plucked from the fire, charred and blackened and almost useless—those whom man rejects as worthless—the base things of the world, and the things that are despised; these are chosen to bring to naught the things that are, so that no flesh should glory in His presence.

Hear the enemy and the Son of Man speaking concerning that smoking brand. The enemy says: It is so worthless and useless, so nearly eaten through with fire, so black and charred—cast it back again into the flame, and take some other. But Jesus says: Because it is so nearly worthless, because no one else would find any use for it, because all others would fling it back to be consumed—there is the more reason why I should take it in hand: nothing less than Divine skill or patience will avail.

And see what He will do for that charred ember. He will take away the filthy garments, clothe with change of raiment, and set the fair mitre of priesthood on his head. From the verge of the pit to the proximity of the throne!

“The fair mitre” may fairly be taken to represent a fresh enduement of the Holy Spirit for service. We must receive a new anointing ere we can go into the temple of God, to perform the priestly offices of praying for the people, and of coming forth to bless them. Let us break in on the heavenly ceremonial, pleading for one another that none may be missed, but that on each the fresh mitre may be bestowed.

## *Two golden spouts.*

*Zech. iv. 12* (R. V.).

WHAT a sermon there is in a wick ! Sit beside it, and ask how it dares hope to be able to supply light for hours and hours to come. "Will you not soon burn to an end, you wick of lamp?" "No; I do not fear it, since the light does not burn me, though it burns on me. I only bear to it the oil which saturates my texture. I am but the ladder up which it climbs. It is not I, but the oil that is in me, that furnishes the light."

Yes, that is it, and when we anticipate the future, our hearts might well misgive us if we were counting on meeting its demands from our only slender resources. But this is not necessary; *we* do not give light to the world; we only receive the oil from the Holy Spirit and the spark of His fire; and if we burn steadily through the long dark hours, it is because we have learned to translate into living beauty those supplies of grace which we receive in fellowship with Jesus.

But how necessary it is that nothing interrupt the flow of oil; that there be no uncleanness permitted to clog and obstruct the narrow bore of the golden spout of faith. Let us daily see to this; let us watch and pray, that there may be no hindrance or impediment; let us draw from our King-Priest more and more of His grace, to enable us to persevere. It cannot be too often repeated, that it is not what we do for Him, but what He does through us, which really blesses men. Be satisfied then to be only a wick unseen amid the glory of the light that crowns it, and willing to be consumed by the daily removal of the charred fringe. Delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus may be manifest in your mortal flesh.

*Then said I to the Angel that talked with me,  
Whither do these bear the ephah?      Zech. v. 10.*

THE first vision of this chapter denounces those who had sinned against the first and second tables of the law; the record of their sin would be written in unmistakable syllables, and would consume the houses of evil-doers with dry-rot (ver. 4). But the second vision is most consolatory. A woman who symbolizes the wickedness of the land is thrust into an immense ephah, and covered with a leaden weight, and then is borne away from the Holy Land by two women in whose wings are strength and speed. Its destination was Babylon; thence had come the principal forms of iniquity, with which the chosen people were cursed, and thither would they return. But what encouragement to every pious Jew to know that the wickedness which had brought God's judgments on the land was removed beyond recall!

This choice is presented to every one of us:— If we refuse to confess our sin, it eats out our heart and life, as cancer and consumption do the fibre of life. If, on the other hand, we confess, and seek the grace of the Holy Spirit, our iniquity will be purged, and the power of sin broken. With swift and sure salvation will God come to our relief, and the chains that bind shall drop from off us like wreaths of hoarfrost before the sun. What though the tendency and possibility of sin remain yet within us; yet the thrall of wickedness is abolished. However many the dark transgressions of the past, when sought for, they cannot be found; and whatever the temptation without, and the frailty within, we are learning to abhor that which is evil, and cleave to that which is good. So our path mounts up on a stairway of light to the gates of everlasting day. “Awake to righteousness, and sin not.”

*Behold the Man whose name is The Branch.*

*Zech. vi. 12.*

THREE men came from Babylon, where many Jews remained, even after the return under Ezra and Nehemiah; they brought presents to the new-found temple. Their names were Robust; the Goodness of God; God-knows. Of the gold and silver a double crown was made, and placed on Joshua's head: one circle, as emblem of the priest; the other, of the king—the two signifying the final gathering of Israel's outcasts to the Messiah, who would then be recognized as their true King and Priest. In the Jewish commonwealth it was without precedent for the same man to be both king and priest; but as the time drew nearer the advent of the Lord, revelation concerning His marvellous Person grew in clearness, and the majestic combination of glory in His character became apparent. In His Church Christ is Priest and King, after the order of Melchizedek, and between the two offices is no dispute.

As *Branch*, He is a scion of David's ancient stock; and through His far-reaching boughs the sap of the eternal purpose breaks into flower and fruit. He sprouted out from His place, Bethlehem, as predicted, and as befitted one of David's line.

As *Builder*, He began to *build* the Temple of the Lord, laying its foundations in the blood of His cross. He quarries the stones from the hearts of His people, and superintends the plan of the growing structure, as its Architect. Through the ages tier after tier is being added, though the builders pass: and He will place the top-stone at His second advent. The Temple grows toward completion. Let us ask whether we have been built into its fabric, or left as those huge boulders at Baalbec, shaped for the temple but never carried beyond the quarry.

*When ye fasted and mourned . . . did ye at all  
fast unto Me, even to Me ?*                      *Zech. vii. 5.*

THE men at Bethel asked this question of the priests ; it was answered by the prophet. The fast of the fifth month was in memory of the fall of Jerusalem ; that of the seventh commemorated the murder of Gedaliah, when the last blow was struck at Jewish independence. The question was : Should the restored Jews continue these fasts now that the events they recalled were forgotten in the abounding joy of the new state ? It was a question of rite and ceremony and outward observance ; and the prophet answers in effect : “ Ye take much trouble and thought about the observance of a man-constituted religious rite ; would that you were equally solicitous to practice those virtues, and denounce the vices, which were the theme of so many expostulations and warnings of the older prophets.”

God invariably demands a religion which does not consist in outward rites and ceremonies, but is inward and spiritual ; and demands true judgment, the showing of mercy and compassion, the forsaking of oppression and evil imaginings. This is unpalatable enough to the natural man, who pulls away his shoulder.

On the general question, one would advise that there is no need to observe the sad anniversaries of our sins and their accompanying punishment, if once we are assured of God's free forgiveness. When He forgives and restores, the need for dwelling on the bitter past is over ; and we should put off our sackcloth and array ourselves with festal garments. This is a most salutary and necessary lesson. Too many of us are always dwelling beside the graves of the dead past. Each month has an anniversary of something we have lost. “ Not looking behind ” should be the motto of our Christian life.



*Should it also be marvellous in Mine eyes, saith the Lord?*  
*Zech. viii. 6.*

MARVELLOUS! Marvellous!! Probably there is no adjective more frequently on our lips than this, in these wonderful years when we are reaping the harvest of centuries of patient sowing, and when any morning the newspapers may announce a discovery which will revolutionize our methods of illumination, or locomotion, or military organization.

The other day we were told that the philosopher's stone was found at last; and that silver can be transformed into gold; to-morrow we may rub our eyes at the marvellous news that the North Pole has been reached. Men resemble the little child led into a toy-shop, or listening to a lecture at the Royal Institute, with open-eyed wonder and open-mouthed exclamation.

But none of these things are wonderful to God; they are but the unravelling of His thoughts, the discovery of His secrets! They are only marvellous to us because we are as yet in the baby stage, waking up to know a little of what a wonderful God He is. Like a little child in Wonderland, our God is leading man from room to room, telling him such wonderful stories of His nature and creative work, as make us continually exclaim, How wonderful!

But there are more wonderful things than these—that rebels should be forgiven, prodigals restored, the sons of darkness changed into children of light, Satan driven out before the stronger than he, the unclean heart made the pure temple of the holy God. Talk they of marvels in the natural world! These pale before the star of Bethlehem, the sunset of Calvary, and the radiance of the Resurrection morning. And we shall see greater things than these, when we follow on to know through unending ages.



*Because of the blood of thy covenant, I have sent forth thy prisoners.*  
*Zech. ix. 11.*

THE state of the Jews in Palestine is presented under the figure of prisoners, shut up, as Joseph of old, in disused water-pits, from which the water had been drawn off, leaving a miry swamp behind. Jeremiah sank in one of these, almost to suffocation. But all the while they might reasonably be prisoners of hope, not of despair; of hope, because the seventy years had expired; of hope, because the purpose of their captivity had been achieved; of hope, because God had entered into covenant with their fathers, and had ratified it with blood. And, because of this, they would go forth out of the pit.

These words will probably be read by many other prisoners: prisoners of circumstance; prisoners in the hands of strong oppressors; prisoners in the utmost extremity. They fear every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as though he were ready to destroy. Behold, I bring to such of these as are united with the Son of God, good tidings of great joy! God will ever be mindful of His covenant. You may forget, or be utterly unworthy of His continued favor; you may have involved yourself in difficulties of your own making, the consequences of your own sin; but you must never forget that you are bound to God by the blood of an everlasting covenant. In the depth of your despair you may appropriate the psalmist's words, "Remember the covenant!" And He who brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd, will raise you from the dark dungeon, and make you sit with princes. He will certainly chasten, but He will assuredly redeem. Be of good cheer, ye prisoners of hope! According to covenant, God comes down the long corridor to throw open the prison doors.

*They shall be as though I had not cast them off :  
for I am the Lord their God.*                      *Zech. x. 6.*

GOD distinguishes, in these words, between the civil rulers of the people, called shepherds, and the people, His flock. He was determined to interpose on the behalf of His people, and to redeem them from the troubles in which their rulers had involved them. The distinct mention of Judah and Israel foreshadows a more complete restoration than that which had brought them from Babylon; in which Judah alone, with a few other Israelites from the other tribes, participated. This restoration is yet future; but when it comes, it will be so complete that the long history of the centuries shall be obliterated; and both the house of Judah and the house of Joseph will be as though they had never been cast off.

Hast thou been cast away from the hand of God—not as far as thy salvation is concerned, but for His purposes of service? Be sure to put away your sin. Ask for rain in the time of the latter rain—the gracious rain of the Holy Spirit; put away the false ideals which you have followed, as Israel false gods; then He will bring you again.

Your sins shall be remembered no more—the deep gulf of separation shall be bridged; the years devoured by the locust shall be restored; the dead past shall bury its dead; the river of the water of life will flow again into the channels which it filled once with music, but have so long been dry; and you shall be as though you had never been cast away. If you take the precious from among the vile, you shall not remove. God not only forgives, but obliterates the memory of past failure and sin. He reposes as much confidence in us as though we had never deceived Him; He treats His prodigals as though they had never gone astray.

*I took two staves, the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands.*                      *Zech. xi. 7.*

THE prophet exercised his office amongst the poor of the land. They gave heed unto him (ver. 11), and recognized that he spoke the word of the Lord. It always has been so; and such people make the best flock, for pastoral oversight.

One day, the prophet appeared amongst these humble folk with two staves: Beauty, to represent the possible excellence of the people whom God loved; Bands, to denote the unity by which the entire nation should have been bound in one. These twain he broke to show, first, that God would be compelled to choose another people to set forth His praise; and, secondly, that the unity of Israel would be annulled. When his hearers had received these announcements, wrung from his heart, their sole response was to make a collection amongst them in recognition of his pastoral care; and this amounted only to the price of a good bond-servant (Exod. xxi. 32). What a miserable return for all the prophet's tears and words!

All this was symbolical of our Lord. He longs for the beauty and unity of His Church. But, alas! how bitterly He has been disappointed! How hopelessly He has snapped His staves! How ungraciously His reward has been meted out to Him! (Matt. xxvi. 15). The historical counterpart of this scene was afforded in His closing discourses and final betrayal; and its spiritual counterpart is being enacted day by day. O my soul! hast thou missed the beauty and unity He chose for thee? Hast thou esteemed His service of small account? Art thou like the Pharisees, that use the price of blood for the Potter's Field? (Matt. xxvii. 6, 7, 10). Repent thee, lest the Good Shepherd be compelled to adopt severer methods, and pass thee also through the refining fires.

*They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced,  
and they shall mourn.*                      Zech. xii. 10.

THE fulfillment of these words is evidently future. A time is undoubtedly coming when the Jews shall recognize that Jesus is their brother. That scene in Joseph's palace, when he made himself known to his brethren, and they looked on him whom they had cast into the pit and mourned with bitter tears, shall be literally enacted before the eyes of the world. The prophet tells us that this great reconciliation will take place, when their foes will be in the siege against Jerusalem; from which we infer that they will be restored to their own land in unbelief, but will be led to recognize Jehovah-Jesus when He comes to their rescue (Rev. i. 7).

But the interesting point for us to notice is the precise place in which their morning breaks out with its exceeding great and bitter cry. It is *after* they have been saved (ver. 7); *after* they have been engirded with strength; *after* their foes have been destroyed. Then the sluice-gates of sorrow are opened, and the bitter tears gush forth. They look on Him whom they pierced, and mourn. This is the true place of penitential grief. It was when the woman had been already forgiven that she loved much, and covered the Lord's feet with tears.

Do not chide yourself if your sorrow for sin is meagre and belated. This is quite likely to be the case, until you have deeper experience of the love of your dear Lord. But the more you know Him; the more you gaze on the piercings of His heart, the more you will mourn, as one that is in bitterness for the firstborn. Pour on me this grace, O Lord, and give me this brokenness of heart! It was the figure of Christ on the cross that broke down Count Zinzendorf's proud heart.

*Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my Fellow. Zech. xiii. 7.*

THERE is no uncertainty as to the application of these striking words. On the eve of His death our Lord appropriated them to Himself. To His troubled disciples was He not the Shepherd and they the little flock? (Matt. xxvi. 31). How well every word suits His lips.

He was a Shepherd, true, steadfast to His Father's charge. There is a special emphasis in the pronoun *my*: since the Father had given over to His care a number of souls who were His, but whom He committed to the Son with the charge that He should lose none, but raise all of them up at the last day.

But He was more than Shepherd. He was Jehovah's Fellow. From eternity He had dwelt in the bosom of the Father. He counted not equality with God a prize to be grasped at, as though there were any uncertainty about it. It was His native right. To all the deep secrets and purposes of God He was privy: in all the plans of creation, providence, and redemption, He had fellowship. My Shepherd, said the Almighty; and my Fellow. But, O my soul, stand still and wonder: He who was all this became also a man! What an astonishing combination: The man that is "my Fellow"! The mediator between God and man was Himself—man.

But listen to the appeal to the sword of Divine justice. It had slept. Even since the sin of Eden it had remained quiet and unavenging. The pledge of the Son to come in the fullness of time met all its demands. But when He came it awoke. He was made sin for us: He bore the penalty of our transgression: He was led as a lamb to the slaughter and slain. And now, O sword of Divine Justice, Thou hast returned into Thy sheath, never again to awake.

*In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord. Zech. xiv. 20.*

IN the days which the prophet anticipated, the knowledge and love of God would be universally diffused. The method in which he expresses this is as significant as it is beautiful. Horses were forbidden under the Jewish law, because of the temptations they presented to pride and war ; but they would become dedicated to God, and their furniture or trappings would be emblazoned with the same sacred words that shone of old from the high priest's golden frontlet. So, the commonest utensils in the Lord's house would become as sacred vessels.

Such a day ought to be our everyday experience. "Holiness to the Lord" should be written on our commonest and most ordinary actions. The holy emotions and intentions that thirst in our bosoms on the Lord's day and in the Lord's house should always characterize us. Whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, we should do all for the glory of God.

Many bells ring in our lives hour by hour : for awaking from our sleep, for meals, for work in the school or factory, for our attendance on those who employ us. There is the bell of call for the surgeon, the clergyman, the man of business. Let us look on each summons, from whatever quarter, as being the call of God, as much so as the recurring duties of the priests in the temple of old ; and let us regard each opportunity as a sacred bowl, from which we may pour out some holy libation to the glory of God. We can only live like this when we have consecrated ourselves absolutely to God, and regard our entire life as being marked out in all its details as a sacred plan. It is good also carefully to observe our priestly office, and to remember that we are a holy nation as well as a royal priesthood.



*Present it now unto thy governor.*

*Mal. i. 8 (R. V.).*

MALACHI'S special work was in stirring up the priesthood to their duty, to the proper maintenance of the Temple services. They were very careless of these, and treated their holy duties with great contempt. The special method adopted seems to have been in the presentation of the blind, the lame, and sick on the altar; while the healthy and whole were reserved for private use. "The table of the Lord was polluted, and His meat contemptible." Such unconcealed irreverence and greed could not pass unrebuked. They are asked to compare their service to God with their service to man; their sacrifices in the Temple with their gifts before their governors and rulers. Would these be pleased, and accept the gift, if they were treated in the same way as God was?

Professing Christians might sometimes be addressed in the same terms. When they slip a copper coin into the collecting-bag, which they would not think of offering to the butler in a friend's house; when they give more to the revenue officer than to the Church or poor; when they give to the Lord's work whatever they can spare without loss, and, indeed, are glad to be rid of; whenever they spend more time and strength on public duties than on the calls of Christianity—at such times we might fairly bid them present it to their governor.

In 10th verse (R. V.) God is heard asking for some one to close the doors of the Temple. He would rather this than be mocked by such heartless rites. It was as though He would rather that no prayers were offered, no services maintained, no holy hymn sung—than that there should be such perfunctory and heartless worship. Let us be very careful against this spirit in our daily devotions!



*He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and did turn many away from iniquity. Mal. ii. 6.*

THESE inspiring words, especially the last clause, might well hang in the secret chamber of every servant of God. They were specially prized by the sainted R. M. McCheyne, whose life was a beautiful exemplar of their meaning. You will notice that covenant dates back to the righteous zeal of Phinehas for the honor of God (Num. xxv.). How well God remembers such things, and writes them in ineffaceable characters on the tablets of His memory ! But what a contrast between that noble ancestry and the degenerate successors of Malachi's days !

Do you want to turn many away from iniquity ? You must walk with God, hourly, constantly, in blessed and intimate fellowship, learning from Him who you are to approach, what line you are to follow in dealing with them, and the message you are to deliver. You must expect to come into collision with them : they are coming in one direction, whilst God and you will be going in just the reverse. But go on walking with God ; fear His fear ; know the terror of losing His companionship, even for a moment ; be perfectly transparent in speech and life ; let your lips be weighted with His messages only. The result will more than compensate. Yours will be the abundant life, and yours the peace which is unspeakable ; yours will be the uprightness of soul which carries the Divine radiance on its face, and yours the joy in arresting the way of transgressors and sinners.

Plead this promise : " Lord, let me be used to turn many away from iniquity," and notice that this most blessed result will accrue much less from what you say than from what you are. It was Levi's walk and converse with God, more even than his words, that produced this wholesale reformation.

*He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver.* *Mal. iii. 3.*

IF you are just now in the fire, dear soul, be of good cheer—it shows at least that you are silver, and that you are capable of performing more acceptable service in God's holy Temple. If it were not so, God would not take so much pains. He chastens those whom He loves, and prunes the branches that are already bearing fruit. What a comfort it is that He surrenders this work to no other hands than His own. He may give His angels charge concerning us when we are in danger; but He keeps our purification beneath His special superintendence.

But notice that He *sits*. What patience is here! However many years thou mayest have to lie on that couch, He will sit beside thee. The nurses will go off duty, but He never. Love may faint and be weary, and nod into light slumbers; but He never slumbers nor sleeps. Those that were most frequent in attendances may drop off; but He will sit, night and day—when the soul is lonely, and when the room is filled with cheery voices; when the pain is almost unbearable—reach out the hand, you will touch His; breathe the softest sigh, He will answer, “I am here.”

And the process will be continued until the scum has passed away, with its rebellion and murmuring, and His dear face shines, sweetly mirrored in its every outline and lineament. Then the fires will die down, and He will bid thee arise to reap the full reward. God is set on reviving the better, holier past, to which some of us revert with tender interest. “It was better with me then than now,” we sometimes say. But the tender grace of those days that are dead will come again to the soul, who yields to God's refining. “The offering of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old.”

*The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings.*

*Mal. iv. 2.*

AT the end of the Old Testament it is meet that the sun should break out. The morning that broke on Paradise was clear enough. It was without clouds. But the sky soon became darkened, and at last veiled, with only here and there a chink of blue sky left. All through the dark succeeding centuries there have been gleams of sunshine to let men know that the sun was shining still. Every precious promise, every solemn type, every holy life, that was bathed in supernatural beauty, was like a shining forth of the sun through the bars of human darkness and sin. But evidently more was in store than Old Testament saints had dreamed; and the time was coming when the reign of type, symbol, and parable, would be succeeded by the clear vision of the face of God.

We live in the days of open vision. Let us go forth and exult. We are to rejoice in every good thing He gives us. As the young calves of the early spring manifest their exuberant life in their caperings and gambols in the pastures, so let us give expressions to our joy. Exult because of the clear shining of God's love: exult because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth: exult because He is coming again, as surely as He came once. Wake up, my soul, take psaltery and harp, and sing. The Bridegroom is at hand. Hark! are those His chariot wheels reverberating through the air? Even so! Lord Jesus, come quickly!



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